

P. o. angl.

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[Murray]

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~~B. l. angl. pag. 157.~~

SERMONS

T O

A S S E S.

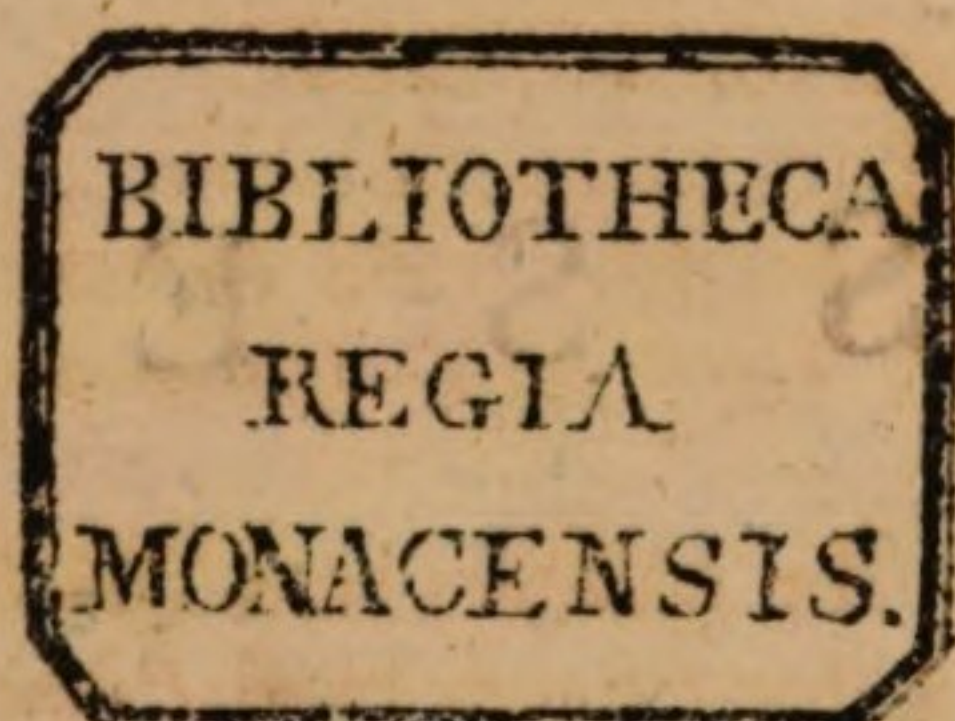
[James Murray]



L O N D O N:

Printed for J. JOHNSON, in Pater-noster-Row;
T. CADELL, (Successor to Mr. MILLAR) in the
Strand; and W. CHARNLEY, at Newcastle.

MDCC LXVIII.



E R R A T A.

Dedication. Page 2. line 3. from the top, for *were* read *was*.

Page 27. line 12. for *are* read *is*.

P. 48. line 7. for *laws* read *law*.

P. 52. line 5. for *know* read *knows*.

P. 62. line 11. for *Jupiter-Hammon* read *Jupiter-Ammon*.

P. 72. line 6. for *Iffachers* read *Iffachars*.

P. 77. line 12. for *Phæton* read *Phaeton*.

P. 78. line 12. for *governors* read *governors*.

P. 81. line 12. for *Iffachers* read *Iffachars*.

P. 86. line 16. for *Neptbali* read *Napthali*.

P. 95. line 14. for *they*, read *they neither*.

P. 101. line 5. for *themselves* read *yourselves*.

P. 101. line 13. for *and a*, read *and is a*.

P. 102. line 3. for *serve them* read *serve him*.

P. 117. line 14. for *would* read *should*.

P. 138. line 1. for *if once*, read *if you once*.

P. 173. line 17. for *it* read *its*.

P. 198. line 8. for *should* read *would*.

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TO THE

Very EXCELLENT and REVEREND

Mess. G.W. J.W. W.R.
and M. M.

THERE are no persons in *Britain* so worthy of a dedication of a work of this kind as yourselves. Some of you have preached for many years to the members of the congregation that these sermons are designed for;—and all of you, as far as your influence can reach, wish well to asses.

If I have offended your excellencies by encroaching upon your employment, it is fit I should beg your pardon, or make some apology.—

But as I once heard one of yourselves say, in a sermon, that there were plenty of work for you, and many more in that way, I hope you will not be offended at receiving a little assistance from one who means well to your congregations.— Hoping you will recommend these sermons to your numerous acquaintances and friends.

I am,

Your most humble servant,

The Author.

P R E F A C E.

IT is usual for preachers when they publish sermons to assign reasons why they do so.—The desire of friends,—and the request of better judges, are often given for reasons of publication. The author of these sermons does not pretend to any of these reasons; yet he conceives he has sufficient reasons for printing his sermons.—The audience to whom he intends to be useful, is far too large for any human voice to extend to them all;—and as he could not speak to them all, so as to *make them hear*, he made choice of this method to communicate his Thoughts.

When a person is disposed to preach a sermon or two for the edification of any of God's creatures, he is under great difficulties to find a proper subject to discourse upon. Almost every character has been described in some sermon or lecture.—And there is not a power of the mind, nor a member of the body, but has been preached and lectured thread-bare.—There are now sermons to young men, and
sermons

sermons to young Women, lectures on heads, and lectures on hearts. Almost every subject is exhausted and sermonized to death.

The author does not remember to have seen any sermons upon the subject he has made choice of, nor heard any preached professedly to his audience. The Reverend Mess. *G. W. J. W. W. R.* and *M. M.* will perhaps be offended at the author, for interfering in their employment, and preaching to their congregations.—But this much the author may say for himself, that he has not preached after their manner;—and to make them some satisfaction, has given them the honour of a dedication.

Every preacher has a right to preach as he pleaseth to such as are disposed to hear him, and in what manner he has a mind for the ends of edification: and if he cannot be so happy as to please his audience, he should take care not to displease himself.

Sermons to asses may appear strange to such as have lately read sermons to young women.

—But

P R E F A C E.

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—But they ought to consider, that something is even due to asses. We read of the ass-kind preaching to mankind,--and why may not men preach to asses?

Some grave persons in black will perhaps say this is an insult upon mankind, and a reflection upon gentlemen in holy orders.—The author can only say he has followed the example of the Patriarch *Jacob*, who preached to asses.

There is some reason to suspect that the preachers will censure these sermons, for wanting some things that ought to be in them ;--and likely for not wanting some things they contain.—But as there is no perfection in this life, the reader must take them as they are. There should have been two volumes of them, for the sake of form, as this has become the customary way of publishing.--But it was thought convenient to postpone one till such time as it should appear how the first was received. These sermons should have been dedicated to the A---b---s, B---s, and their C---y, in hopes that they would have recommended them to public notice ;—but the author was afraid of offend-
ing

ing their modesty with the flattery of a dedication, and for that reason altered his design.

The author has deferred setting his name to these discourses till the twentieth edition, when he may perhaps find D. D. to fix to them, like other authors.

If the clergy or others think it improper to preach to asses, the author may perhaps publish sermons to Doctors in Divinity, where he shall have more regard to method, and the rules of composing sermons. Every preacher ought to consider the qualifications of his audience, and preach accordingly. Tho' there may be some things that may seem a little ludicrous in these sermons,—the reader will find also some serious things deserving his notice. Thus much the preacher can say for himself, that he was very well pleased when he preached them, and had not the least ill will at any of the human race.—This is at least a negative qualification which some preachers are not endowed with. Endowed with said I, they cannot be endowed with what is negative. Call it any thing you please, for I have done.

SERMONS

T O

A S S E S.

GEN. xlix. 14.

*Issachar is a strong Ass, couching down
between two Burdens.*

THE Language of the Old Testament is peculiarly suited for drawing characters in few words. It is usual in the Hebrew language, to draw the image of a multitude in a single character. We find it very usual by the figure of a beast
B to

to point out the image of a people;—and there is always some resemblance between the sign and the thing signified. It is needless to go far for examples,—there is one in the text,—*Iffachar* is a strong ass, &c. Truly he had much need of strength, for he has two burdens.

—The tribe of *Iffachar* were an inactive, slothful, and sluggish people:—they loved rest more than liberty, and chose to be slaves, rather than exert themselves, and assert their privileges. There was a reason for it,—he saw that the land was good, and rest pleasant for him;—agreeable to his slothful and sluggish disposition. Self-interest prevailed more with him than public welfare and national happiness. There are many such asses as *Iffachar*, that prefer present ease and advantage to public

public liberty and national freedom. Our text is a prophecy in the present tense, which is usual in Hebrew writings. Jacob in his last words foretels the character of the tribe of *Issachar*. I need not tell my readers any more concerning the object of this prediction, than that it respected a whole tribe of the children of Israel. It was too well verified in their after behaviour.

Jacob, I think, is the first mentioned in scripture that preached to asses, but many have been thus employed since his time. This is a shameful monosyllable, when applied to reasonable creatures.—Men endowed with reason and understanding to degenerate so basely. What a falling off is here? *Issachar* was a pretty numerous tribe, fifty-four thousand and four hundred;—far too many to be so mean spirited. They
wanted

wanted not strength, but spirit: many good gifts are ill bestowed. Strength without activity but debases human nature. A nation of slaves is a kingdom of asses. It is dishonourable rest and disgraceful pleasure that is established upon the ruin of common weal. Rest is good, but liberty is better. What was I saying?—Rest without liberty is bondage and slavery.

What can these burdens mean that *Issachar* couched down so decently under? They were perhaps civil and religious slavery. Strange! that such a number of rational creatures should so tamely bear such two insupportable burdens.—I had almost forgot that they were asses:—no people of any spirit could endure such grievous bondage without complaining. But who need wonder at *Issachar's* mean spirited condition?

T O A S S E S.

dition? All Europe,—yea the greatest part of the world have couched down between these two burdens of civil and religious oppression.

The Jews in the days of Jesus Christ were become a sort of tame asses;—they couched down till the Priests laid on their burden on the one side, and the Romans laid on their's on the other. This is at best a slovenly character: I wish it were gone out of the world. In scripture an ass is contrasted with a horse, which is a generous animal;—It is tractable, but not abject. Obedience to just laws, and subjection to slavery are two very different things: the first characterises a people wise and good, the latter base, mean spirited and servile.

It is understanding that makes men good subjects, but ignorance makes them slaves. If men through ignorance degenerate to asses, they will always find some ready to fix a burden upon them. Perhaps I shall give offence by repeating this disagreeable epithet: I shall lay it aside, and instead of the sign pursue the thing signified.

The original word signifies an ass of bone, which denotes strength, but implies leanness. Truly all slaves are generally speaking lean;—all who have not the enjoyment of liberty are poor, both in a political and moral sense. There is not a word of *Issachar's* motion in the text: he seems to have been strong, but not swift;—like all people under slavery, not fit for business. He loved rest and ease, and could not:

not be rich. It is the hand of the diligent, not the strong, that maketh rich.—There is never a brisk trade but among a free people; for altho' slaves may be able to work for riches, yet they know not how to use them. Wealth does not consist in Specie, but a right circulation: slaves are indifferent how it is. They have not a true sense of property, nor just notions of right, and therefore want the springs of action, which only can keep reasonable creatures in true motion.

It is wonderful what custom will do. It is called a second nature, and justly: through long use and habit men will stoop to take on their own burdens. *Issachar* stooped down,—well did he deserve a heavy burden for his meanness of spirit. It is soon enough to submit to bondage when we cannot help

it. Slavery is a just reward to such as voluntarily give up their natural rights and privileges : such as do not value freedom and liberty deserve to be slaves. It is finding fault with the conduct of the Almighty to give up his prerogative to his creatures.—Such as voluntarily give up their rights and privileges given them by their maker, and submit to any human yoke, are next to atheists. Men are not at liberty to give up their trust till providence require it. Our first parents ruined themselves by submitting to a new master. When men are conquered, and forced to submit, it is no crime, but a call of providence ; but when for private interest they give up the public welfare, they shew themselves unworthy of the protection of heaven, by rejecting its government.

Time

Time was when there were many of *Issachar's* character in these our native lands.—But thanks to heaven that generation is well nigh dead. About a century ago vast numbers of British subjects were couching down between two burdens of civil and religious oppression. The far greatest part of the inhabitants of Britain were loaden, and prest down with these two heavy burdens.

It is amazing to think how creatures of the same frame and constitution, endowed with the same powers and capacities, should become so submissively the slaves of others. We are all naturally free, our sphere in society may require subordination of individuals, but cannot oblige men to part with their natural rights ; obedience must be an act of
the

the will. In a land of slavery, where Princes are arbitrary, and Kings have absolute power, there is but one public will in a whole nation,—at least it is a mere chance if many agree with the legislator. The prince is mightily deceived if he thinks the subjects obey him, for there is no true obedience, but what proceeds from the heart. *Is-sachar's* burden is hinted at in the following verse; *He became a servant to tribute.* He was made a subject to civil oppression. It did not happen all at once. The mind will remonstrate against bondage till the passions sooth her asleep; it is a work of time to make men perfect slaves, and it is ordinarily some leading passion, or two, that make them so. Love of ease and love of pleasure have brought many thousands into slavery.

When

When all the passions are engaged in pursuing their various and proper objects, according as nature directs and requires, it will be a miracle if men do not jostle themselves clear of their burdens. Nations that do not look farther than their own boundaries, and their original district, will in time turn slaves.— And suppose they should go abroad, to pursue trade and business, unless it be with a design to bring something home, they will remain the same people. There have been many that have made emigrations yet have carried slavery along with them. Those who look abroad for trade, to bring home riches to their native country, will most likely pursue the ends of true liberty.— They go not to other countries to take possession of their lands, but to bring home their riches by fair trade and business..

finess. Such as have a sense of some property in their own country will seek the welfare of it at home or abroad;—and when they by diligence and industry make their fortunes, they will endeavour to bring it home to add to the public interest.

These two burdens, civil and religious oppression, hold all nations in bondage where they prevail;—these are laid on by the power of Princes, and the power of Priests. In some nations the Prince and the Clergy act in concert to fix the burden upon the people: slavery there seems one connected load of bondage. *Mahumedism* seems a burden of this sort. Religion among the *Mahumedans* is an engine of state policy.—However, this burden seems to be compounded of two parts; idolatry, and civil oppression: no man can say he has
any

any property. In Popish countries the case is much the same; there is only this difference, the Magistrate lays on the one burden, and the Priests lay on the other, and they may properly be said to be two, because they respect two different policies;—the Magistrate has also a burden laid upon him by the Priests by church authority.

In case the King should not be *so tractable as they would require*, they were wont to have a method to *make* him bear his burden patiently. They used him as *Balaam* did his ass; belaboured him with church censures, and threatened him with deprivation. But of later times Princes have become so obstinate, that they have bruised the Pope's foot against the wall, and almost kicked him off; for he had always the assurance when he laid on a
burden

burden to get upon the top of it.—Soon may all the Kings of Europe see their own interest, and totally reject his authority. The common people are notwithstanding still oppressed with two burdens. The Prince lays upon them a burden of taxes at his pleasure, and the *Clergy* fix another to make it balance fairly.—And they are so much of *Issachar's* character, that they voluntarily stoop and take on their burdens.

In the burden of civil oppression is contained so much as the Prince hath need of for all the purposes of his pride and ambition:—and if it be the same in all countries where arbitrary government prevails, this burden will comprehend *item* for all things that a man possesseth. This was once the burden of Britain, during the unhappy reign of the Stuarts: it contained in it
several

several articles, such as tonnage and poundage, licence to dress meat, patent for soap, cards and dice, and pins, &c. This burden was fixed upon the subjects by the royal prerogative: it was encreased and alleviated according to his *majesty's gracious pleasure*. This was a very grievous burden, for it extended to all the necessaries of life. A christian could not call his head his own, without paying for it, nor durst any subject suffer the smoke of his chimney to ascend towards heaven, without paying a modus to the King for that privilege. The King of Britain was then the *prince of the power of the air*, as well as King of Britain and Ireland. If all nations where the Prince is arbitrary have such a burden imposed upon them, they had need of much strength and patience.

In those nations where Popery prevails, there is a burden of religious slavery laid upon the people by the Priests:—this consists of *item* for all things in heaven and earth,—together with a severe restraint upon the consciences of men, not to think or act contrary to the judgment of the church. This burden contains several parcels of very ponderous goods: such as the *canons* of the church, the *decrees of councils*, the infallibility of the *Bishop of Rome*: all these, men must receive, however absurd they may appear to them, upon the pain of purgatory, or hell-torments for ever. In a word, every man in that communion must believe almost every thing but the scriptures, which are indeed intirely excluded from this heavy burden.

In case any who have these burdens laid upon them prove any way refractory or perverse, they are put in mind of their duty by very powerful arguments. The holy *office* of the *inquisition* have several *spurs* for such perverse *asses* as will not bear their burdens with patience. They may kick and spurn as they will, but they may as well think of bringing *Rome* to *London*, as think to get clear of their burdens. As in *England* there are schools for training *horses* to learn them their exercise, so they have schools for training such *asses* as they conceive do not bear their burdens with patience : dungeons, where neither light or sunshine ever enter; the very picture of the mansions of the dead,—tortures which furies in council only could contrive, are here the sad monitors

of obedience to miserable mortals. Strange that nothing else could be contrived to convince the consciences of men, but what is fit for the most stubborn and sluggish of animals! Can bodily torture convince the mind? Can hunger and pain give evidence to *absurdity*, and confinement reconcile *contradictions*? Kind Jesus, this was never thy contrivance; whose law is love, whose conduct is all mercy. How can kingdoms bear such a yoke? How can millions of reasonable creatures submit to such unreasonable slavery? It must have cost much time and pains thus to have deprived men of their sense and reason. The human mind must be ~~ca-~~ *capa-*ble of sad depravity, to submit to such *abject* bondage and slavery. Can it be natural to men thus to degenerate into a state of brutal stupifaction? So many millions of rational beings, endowed

dowed with moral capacities, having all the full exercise of the corporeal functions, to submit to be treated like *brutes*; what a shocking consideration! Could not these nations free themselves, by making use of those powers the author of nature hath endowed them with?—They have lost their guide, and are destitute of a leader.—Reason, that guide of mankind, is enslaved, and held captive by enthusiasm and servile superstition.—But is there not some original cause why men degenerate so far below themselves? Can perfect nature relapse so far into barbarity? If all the principles are pure, what is the reason of such a departure from rationality? There is a cause; *reason is duped by the passions*;—those who have address enough to command the *one*, will also overcome the *other*:—when men's eyes are *put out*, they *grope* in the *dark*. Heaven

send the light of the *gospel* to *open* the eyes of such *blinded* mortals, that they may *see* their own interest, and *assert* their own privileges. What can induce men in *sacred offices* thus to play the devil with their fellow-creatures? Interest, sordid self-interest, is the cause. Long hath this principle been the ruling one in the hearts of the clergy of the church of *Rome*: instead of pointing out the way of righteousness to men, and teaching them the way of salvation, they have long treated them like *asses*, and kept them in ignorance. Who gave them that right? Are not all men equally free? *Hath not God made of one blood all the kindreds of the earth?*--But thoughtless mortals give up their privileges through indolence and inactivity. What can men do without instruction? We are all infants before we be men;—
in-

instruction is necessary to make us wise. Suffer men to follow the first bent of their inclinations, and it will be a miracle if they do well.—But nature is not suffered to take her own way,—for if there be none to instruct us, there will be hundreds ready to seduce us: bad as men are, they would not be so ill if they were not seduced. Shall parents neglect to instruct us in the rudiments of true wisdom, and not provide tutors to conduct us in the paths of knowledge, the world and designing men will not neglect to make their own of us, to the ruin of both soul and body.

Where men are no sooner out of the hands of their nurses than they fall into the hands of *priests*, whose leading maxim is, that *ignorance* is the *mother* of devotion, how can they un-

understand their own interest? The first who gave up their privileges, by neglecting to follow after true knowledge, justly *deserved* to *bear* a heavy burden;—but what shall be said of their unfortunate children, who through their negligence and inactivity are trained up in ignorance, and know not how to deliver themselves? Could not the dictates of nature have directed them otherwise? Could not the law of the heart have admonished them against such absurd seduction? Alas! men are capable of being instructed, but cannot learn without teaching. But how shall we vindicate the conduct of providence towards the many thousands of them that sit in darkness? Why should children suffer for the iniquity of their Fathers? Could not the Almighty have sent them the means of knowledge, as
a com-

a compensation for their fathers deficiency? He could, no doubt.

But what if we shall affirm, that this judgment upon several generations of misled and wretched mortals has been suffered to continue, because they abused the dictates of common sense? We read of a people that loved to be seduced; *The prophets prophecy for a reward, and the people love to have it so.* Justly do they deserve slavery who chuse it.

When men are instructed in principles of *true* or *false* knowledge, it must be by either the *use* or *abuse* of their *senses*: false teachers cannot even lead men wrong, without in some measure dealing with their *sensations*. *Sensation* is naturally ingrafted in our nature; our feelings are the workmanship of

our *Creator*. In matters of speculation it may be easy to lead us astray, and as to what things are not the objects of our senses, it may not be difficult to impose upon us; but to believe absurdity, in matters our senses are judges of, must be chusing our own delusions. Suppose through our ignorance of *testimony* men may mislead us, yet in what comes under the notice of our senses, they cannot, unless we please. The senses of the *clown* are generally as quick as those of the *philosopher*, and it requires no more but to use them, as to those things that are their *objects*, to keep clear of seduction. Tho' every man is not able to judge of the orthodoxy of a *creed*, and the truth of the *canons* of the *church*, yet they are able, by the exercise of their senses, to know that *bread* is not *flesh*, nor *wine blood*;—and that the same *body*
cannot

cannot be in a thousand places at the same time. When men thus depart from *common sense*, which their maker has endowed them with, it is but just to deprive them of other advantages, which there is a likelihood they would give up through indolence, as they do their senses. The Almighty knows what use men would make of better enjoyments, and when he tries them with common mercies, which they abuse, he vindicates his providence in withholding others of higher value, as a punishment of their crime for abusing what he hath bestowed.—*He that is faithful in little will be faithful also in that which is greater.*

Such as are endowed with *common sense*, and depart from it, or give it up, but ill deserve to be entrusted with the *sublimest* truths of *religion*.—What!
common

common sense is the *foundation* of *religion*. Such as depart from, or are destitute of it, could not really be truly religious. When we consider the situation of many deluded nations and people, we cannot but pity them, but at the same time cannot hold them *guiltless* for giving up their senses. Such as have had the happiness of enjoying better instruction than others who remain in ignorance, upon a little reflection may find they have nothing to boast of. The inhabitants of *Italy* and *Spain* are not the only people who receive *absurdities*. In a land where freedom is the privilege, and boast of almost every subject, we may perhaps find, a tame enough submission to several *absurdities*.

Not, you will say, in *Britain*, a land renowned for all sorts of liberty:—a
nation

nation to which there is none equal upon the face of the earth, that we know of.—We have reason indeed to be thankful to the *Almighty* for the liberty we enjoy,—but *Britain* is only comparatively free. It matters not whether men become *slaves* or are made so, if they are really in bondage; *Isaiah* couched down and became a slave. To the charge of our *Sovereign* nothing can be laid, that tends to affect our *liberties*.—But perhaps there are yet something in our *laws* that fixes a *burden* upon several of the subjects. Is a man intirely free, who is subjected to losses and disappointments by the *laws* of his country, on account of his religion? Is he altogether a free subject, who is faithful to civil government, and whose principles teach him to be so, and yet is deprived of some of its advantages on account of his method

thod of worshipping God? Is he free of a burden, who must either submit to a *test act*, contrary to the dictates of his own *conscience*, or lose a privilege that may redound to the welfare of his country?

It is easy for such as have enlarged consciences to call this no hardship, and such as love to make a *monopoly* of *privileges* to say he may let alone;—but where then is our much boasted-of *liberty*, when it only consists in negatives of this kind? Even this is not always the case. Shall a good subject refuse the calls of his *King* and his *Country* in the time of danger, to help them out of difficulty? On the one hand he might be reckoned *disaffected*, and on the other he could not miss to be *unconscientious*. Here the laws of his country lay him under *bondage*, and bring him

him into a grievous dilemma. A *burden* this is *undoubtedly*, however light it may seem to such as are not immediately concerned. Can such slavery be necessary to make faithful subjects, and good members of society? Or do not such restrictions tend to fill places of power and influence with men of no principle? Strange that men cannot be supposed *faithful, just, and good*, unless they kneel down before an altar, and communicate in a way their consciences remonstrate against. Is not this something like laying a snare for our brethren? There is certainly no reason to suspect the *loyalty* of all those who scruple to communicate with the *church of England*,—nor is such a compliance any evidence of a true member of society, or a good subject.—There is even reason to suppose, that persons who have been otherwise educated, do
not

not act sincerely in such a compliance:— at least it is a great snare to their honesty. Can the kingdom of *Jesus Christ* be so dependent upon the kingdoms of this world, as that it cannot subsist, if any be admitted to *civil preferment* without giving security for their behaviour towards *it*? In what part of the New Testament do we find this *alliance* between *church* and *state* founded, so that a man cannot be found qualified for any office in the one, without first becoming a member of the other? It is but reasonable to have some New Testament warrant for a matter of so great importance. Arguments taken from convenience, and the alteration of circumstances, will not bear any weight with a sincere conscience till once it is made good, that the alteration of the kingdoms of this world make a change in the *kingdom of Jesus Christ*.

It

It has been often affirmed, that our circumstances are much altered since the times of *Christ* and his *Apostles*, which is an undoubted truth ; but this does not, I hope, infer that the laws of *Christ's kingdom* have undergone any alteration. There have been many great alterations since the *Magna Charta* of *England* was granted, and yet it is allowed to be the foundation of our civil privileges, and continues unaltered.— And if it be true, what I have often heard, the constitution would be destroyed if *this* was taken away. The *New Testament* is the *Magna Charta* of the Church, which is the kingdom of *Jesus Christ* ; if once we make Incroachments upon it, then the liberties of the church are at an end. In scripture account, adding or diminishing are equally destructive of privilege. I think
before

before any additions are made to the *laws* and *rules* *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* have given to the christian church, they should be proved first defective and insufficient:—and before any thing is taken from these laws, they ought to be made appear to be redundant. If either of these can be made evident, the divinity of the scripture will be at an end, and there will be no *gospel church* at all. There has been of late times much noise about the increase and spreading of *infidelity*, and none have made more noise concerning it than those who have been the cause of it. When *fathers* in *councils*, and *bishops* in *convocation*, have made so free with the scriptures, as to add to the worship of God, so many *decent things*, that never were appointed by *Christ* or his *Apostles* in the *New Testament*, and at the same time attempt

tempt to prove the necessity of these additaments;—the inference from this is very easy, and plain, that the scriptures are not perfect in things belonging to christian duty. If once men begin to add any *one thing*, that is not specified in the *word* of *God*, who can tell where the end may be? Hath the *Spirit* of *God* been so exact in all things pertaining to *faith* and *practice* among christians, and yet been deficient as to what is *decent* and *comely* in the worship of *God* and the ceremonies of the church? What a severe reflection is this upon the *Holy Spirit* of the *Most High*? What rude and unpolished mortals have the Apostles of *Jesus Christ* been, to have no rules of decency in their worship of the *Almighty*? Strange that they should have been so exact in all other matters of importance pertaining to the *church* of *God*, and so much

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deficient in comely *order* and *decency*? Though they were illiterate fishermen, and not bred like our *modern clergy*, yet the *Holy Spirit* that inspired them certainly knew what was *decent* and *orderly*;—at least he knew better what would please God, than all the *councils* and *convocations* that ever existed.

It is no hard matter to account for the growth of infidelity. When those who have assumed sacred functions, have made free to *alter* and *add* at their pleasure, in things pertaining to religion. What could such as were enquiring and not yet settled in their principles, infer, but that there was nothing certain in divine revelation? Is it not to use men like asses, to tell them they have a compleat *revelation* of the *will of God* in the scriptures, and yet impose many things upon them that are
not

not mentioned therein? To say that the word of God is plain and perfect in all things pertaining to godliness, and yet alledge, that it cannot sufficiently direct us into *truth*, and guard us against *error*, unless it is set forth by so many Divines, in *thirty-nine* articles, or *thirty-three* chapters, sounds something like a contradiction. Much need have men to be *strong in faith*, that are thus required to believe without evidence? *Rome* hath gone far in the practice of absurdities, but she never required any other foundation but *implicit faith* to build' them upon: what is not manifestly evident from the word of God to every man that is required to give his assent, can never be an article of his *faith*: he may be so complaisant as to believe as the church doth, in his words, and *public confession*, but is an infidel at heart notwithstanding.

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standing. But why should men be led into temptation, thus to prevaricate before God? Were there open access to *church offices* and *preferments*, to such as professed to believe the *scriptures*, and were found qualified, some might still be *infidels*, but the church would have no hand in making them so;—and there is the greatest reason to believe, that infidelity could never be built upon the doctrine of the *Prophets* and *Apostles*, where *Jesus Christ* is the *chief corner stone*. The purity of the *sacred oracles*, when immediately presented to the conscience, is more likely to prevent *prevarication*, than these compositions, where there is some reason *to doubt* there may be *some mistake*.

So long as the pure oracles of God were the only creed of the church, we find her members more *simple* and
sincere,

sincere, than ever they have been since: but as soon as the doctrine of *Revelation* began to be cloathed in a human dress, it did not strike the mind with such *reverence* and *godly fear*: afterwards men made more free with sin, and began to find *church authority* for committing it.—Till at last they could produce *indulgences* for almost any kind of *wickedness*. What influence could articles of religion framed by such men have, who, when they were forming *canons* for the *church*, were forming also *licences* for all kinds of *immorality*? Even in *England*, it is not difficult to find the same authority that authorized the *book of Canons*, authorising the *book of Sports*, whereby a licence was given for any who pleased to profane the *Lord's Day*, to the dishonour of all religion whatsoever. Could any person who had the least

consideration reconcile two things absolutely contrary to each other, viz. *Articles of religion*, and a *licence* to break them, in their constant Practice?

It would have been next to a miracle if infidelity had not gained ground, when it received such strength and support from the *leaders in religion*. Out of the same mouths could not consistently come both *blessing and cursing*; *laws* for religion, and a *licence* for impiety. Can any people be accounted of any other character but that of *Isachar* in the text, who suffer such religious *slavery* and *absurdity* to be imposed upon them? Is the word of God imperfect, that it cannot direct men in all matters of religion, without it be clothed with *human inventions*, and the *authority of the church*? He is a christian that submits to the yoke of *Christ*,
but

but a *slave* that takes on any other. Shall men pretend to impose any other burdens than the easy and light burden Christ hath required, let us be *christians*, and not *slaves*; not couch down like *Issachar* between *two* burdens, but *stand fast* in that *liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free*, and not suffer ourselves to be *entangled in any yoke of bondage*.

To come to a conclusion. Let it be observed, when ever men are required to believe any thing upon human authority in matters of religion, or to worship God in any other manner than they are plainly required in scripture, it is a burden of religious slavery, and not the yoke of *Christ*. They do not deserve the character of rational creatures, to say nothing of the christian character, who tamely give up their

reason, and their *Bible*, to the hands of religious oppressors. Well do they deserve to bear a burden of religious slavery, who do so tamely couch down and take it on. We shall soon have heavy enough burdens imposed upon us, if we so submissively couch down to them: if men but enjoy the exercise of *common sense*, they will never meanly give up their right of private judgment to the will of oppressors. Ye, who, like *Issachar*, for the love of ease, or the love of pleasure, or for the gratification of some sordid passion, submit to burdens, as unnatural as they are unreasonable; be not offended if your character be drawn after the manner of that of his. *Asses*, and worse than *asses*, surely you are, who either give up the cause of your country, or the rights of your own consciences to civil or religious dominators.

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The character of NAPTHALI, how different from that of his brother? *Napthali is a hind let loose ; an assertor of liberty. Issachar is a strong ass, couching down between two burdens.* God give all men the knowledge of their privileges, and a spirit of true zeal to maintain them. *Amen.*

The character of the Hall, how different from the other brother's. Vainly it is a kind of tool; an object of utility. It is a thing, all something, not between two persons. Each give all their knowledge of their privileges and a point of view to maintain them. When

S E R M O N

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and the Lord upon the mountains
and the Lord upon the mountains
and the Lord upon the mountains
and the Lord upon the mountains

SERMONS

TO

A S S E S.

SERMON II.

GEN. xlix. 14.

*Iffachar is a strong Ass, couching down
between two Burdens.*

WELL may they press him down,
and sit hard upon his shoulders,
till he learn his own interest, and throw
them off. I wish, *Iffachar*, thy chil-
dren had all died in the first gene-
ration;

ration; but thou hast yet a numerous offspring in the world: many are the beasts of burden even in christian nations. Thy sons, *Issachar*, are in the church, and in the state: from the minions of *prime ministers*, down to the lowest journeyman of the *bishops* and *clergy*, thy offspring are scattered abroad. Thy seed fills the houses of *nobles*, *knights*, and *'squires*; some of them eat at their tables, and others serve behind them. There is scarce an office in the church, or under the crown, but some of thy progeny are in possession thereof in all countries. Court and convocation, the church and the theatre, are crouded with thy descendants: from the cathedral, down to the smallest dissenting congregation, some of thy sons are in place. In all places of public concourse, the sons of *Issachar* make a large party. Whoever shall attend any place

place of public concourse, shall find a great number of thy descendants: so stupid and thoughtless are men turned, that they every day bring themselves under burdens which they might easily prevent.

There are many burdens fixed upon us by the stupidity of former generations, that even these who would, cannot so easily get clear of them, in our times. Heaven grant help to such as are forced to any piece of slavery against their inclination, and speedily give them deliverance. We live under a government where grievances will be considered, if *faithfully represented*, and it is surely our own fault if we bear burdens. The burden is often *heavy*, and the cry *loud*, but proper means of redress are seldom pursued. It is to be feared we are not yet prepared for deliverance, for we do not apply for it earnestly,
nor

nor make use of *proper means* : we groan like *asses*, but do not bestir ourselves.

I shall consider some grievous burdens that several of this free nation bear, which are very unreasonable, and consider a method to have them removed.

1. There is a burden of *taxes* upon the poor, which they are not able to bear. It needs no proof, for it is sufficiently felt, that many of the necessities of life pay very heavy duties. It may be, for any thing I know, necessary for the paying of *public expences*, that the subjects are so burdened; but there ought certainly some regard to be had to the strength of the *beasts of burden*. All *asses* are not equally strong.—They should be burdened

dened according to their strength and abilities. Meat, drink, and clothing should be made as easy as possible; things without which we cannot live, ought to be gently taxed. The poor cannot well live with less necessary food than the rich, neither can they go naked. There must be some reasons why they do not enjoy the necessaries of life according to their needs. The very shoes of their feet are taxed. They enjoy no light but what pays duty to the government. I may be mistaken, for perhaps they pay for their *windows* and *candles*, but not for the light of them.—But the window, the candle, and the light are so nearly related, that in many cases we cannot well separate them. But whatever may be the *theory* of these things, there are none but feel them in *practice*. There are several things which might bear

bear duty better than these by which the poor live. Let all the superfluities of life pay—but why oppresses the poor? Even *asses* deserve pity—a *merciful man is merciful towards his beast*. There is no reasoning against power, where there is no laws to restrain it; but as we have laws securing our privileges, why should any subjects be oppressed? We may certainly complain with safety, even suppose we should not immediately receive redress. One would readily suppose that there should be some proportion between the burdens laid upon the poor, and the dearth of the necessary provisions, and the quantity of current specie:—one of these should certainly take place, either to have *taxes lessened, provisions cheaper, or money more plenty*. As to the *theory* of these matters, or how they may be balanced in the *æconomy of a prime*

prime minister, that is not my province to say; but I think every subject may say when he is *oppressed*, he is not *free*. Even when men are doing their utmost endeavours to serve their *King* and *Country*, it is hard they should not be able to live, when the quantity of provisions in the kingdom are far from being scarce. When demands are made upon the lower part of mankind for the ordinary rate of duty imposed upon them by the *government*, they are obliged to pay, or be distressed; but cannot either raise their wages, or lower the prices of provisions. If they complain, they are not heard; if they resist, they are belaboured like *asses*; or if through *hunger* and *want* they should be compelled to rise up to relieve themselves, then they must wait the issue of a trial in some *court of justice*, where the consequences are very

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visibly

visibly represented in *some late cases*.—
Merciful Lord, would any people rise
in mobs to disturb a peaceable nation if
they could help it, who have been so
ready in time of war to venture their
lives for its safety! Nay, it is *pinching
hunger* that is the cause of it. Some
few there may be that may join in
riots without a cause; but the subjects
of *Britain* love their *King* and *Country*
too dearly to disturb their peace. Rea-
sonable duty all good subjects will be
disposed to pay; but when the weight
lies upon the poor, where is the *rea-
sonableness* of the *tax*? It is no re-
flection upon the King that the *poor*
are oppressed, for he does not make
the laws: the subjects oppress one ano-
ther.—They are like the *fishes of the
sea*, the *great* devour the *small*;—only
with this difference, that we are *de-
voured by law*.

I have

I have not mentioned the names and number of that *burden* of *taxes* with which we are oppressed, for they are well known. The very paper I am writing upon has not escaped the *excise*. This may perhaps be reasonable; for men may live without writing, but cannot without food and raiment. In several respects the poorer sort of the subjects are *not free*; they are obliged to *couch down* between *two burdens*: one of *taxes*, and another of *artificial scarcity of provisions*. We have this liberty above those nations where arbitrary power prevails, we may utter our complaints, without danger, providing we make no rash attempts to ease ourselves.

But for all this *burden* of *taxes* there is some shew of reason; *government must*

be supported, the debt of the nation must be paid off, pensioners must be maintained, and clerks dues must be discharged. All these things the valet de chambre of a minister of state know better than I can pretend to.—But there is,

2. *A burden which several of his majesty's subjects are made to couch down under, for which I can see no reason at all.—To pay for bread and wine they never taste, to entertain people they have no concern with. This they say we are obliged to do by law, at least they threaten us with it, if we refuse to pay. If it be law, it is not justice to make persons pay for other people's provisions, when they are abundantly able to do it themselves. But why pay for the bread and wine made use of at Easter, and not also for every other month of the year? This*
is

is perhaps for the whole.—It is far too much for those who do not make use of it.—But they may if they will; but why may they not if they will? Is there any *compulsion* in matters of religion, in a land of liberty?—But they are not *compelled* to *eat* and *drink*, but *to pay*. And where is the reason for that? If it was charity it would be due, but where is the righteousness of the demand? I am afraid it favours of a *law* that was excogitated at *Rome* many hundred years ago. It is reasonable that every *communicant* pay; but why *impose* upon *Dissenters*?—Especially such as have no freehold. Must every householder pay for what he never has any benefit by? This is surely such a *burden* as the *scribes* and *pharisees* laid in old times upon the common people.

What law of *Christ* and his *Apostles* is this founded upon? It should be founded some where in the New Testament, for it relates to religion. I should pay it for conscience sake, if they will shew me where its required in the *gospel*. It is surely neither *decent* nor *orderly* to make a feast, and oblige every one to pay for it, whether they can *in conscience* do it or not. This is using men like *asses* with a witness. They ill deserve communion with their Saviour, that are not willing to bear the expence of the outward elements of that communion. Say that it is *charity*, or *prove* that it is *scriptural*, and all good christians will pay it for *conscience sake*. It is but reasonable they have some satisfaction for their money. Any people that were not past shame, would blush to demand a thing

thing for a religious use, they could not produce a warrant for from the word of God. *The love of money is the root of all evil*, and the passion for it prevails no where more than *near the altar*. Ah ye *priests!* ye make us pay for all things; ye catch us as soon as we come into the world; and ye never lose sight of us till we return to dust. Our mothers must pay you for bearing of us, our fathers for having us baptized. When we are married, and when we are buried, *ye must be paid*. When we come into the world, and when we go out of it, ye set a price upon our heads.—And did these two demands satisfy you we might forgive you; but as long as our heads are on our bodies, we must *satisfy* you every year for the *use of them*: we may truly say all our things are yours. You must taste of all our substance:
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the tithe of all we have that is valuable, and suitable for you, is *yours*. You say *tithes* were appointed under the *law* for the *tribe* of *Levi*, and the sons of the *priesthood*: but remember, *ye Levites*, *Jesus Christ* was not of your *tribe*: he belonged to a tribe that did not serve at the *altar*; and he did not institute any *priests*, nor give any laws concerning *tithes*. As we are christians you can have no just demands upon us: let such as observe the *jewish religion* pay *tithes*, but what have we to do with the sons of *Levi* under the *gospel*. Gracious and merciful *Saviour*, thou came to set christians free from bondage and slavery, and to give them deliverance from the *law* of *Moses*, but we are still laid under a load of slavery that has no foundation in *thy gospel*, but is fixed upon us by that law. Thy *Apostles* received no *tithes*, for
they

they were *christians*, and meek and humble like *thee* : they loved to set men free, but not to oppress them. They testified against the ceremonial law at the peril of their lives, and told christians that it did not profit ;—and to such as observed it *Christ did profit them nothing*.—But circumstances are much altered since their time,—and we have reason to believe not at all for the *better*, but for the *worse*. It is a hard matter that christians are still obliged to support a *jewish priesthood* under the *gospel*. *Priesthood* ! I must go far back to find this office :—there have been none since *Jesus Christ finished transgression, and put an end to sin*. It is an Old Testament office.—Now under the *gospel*, all the *Lord's people are priests* in the language of the New Testament : *ye are a royal priesthood*. But what does it signify what the

the New Testament says; the *liturgy of some churches says*, we have *priests*, and they must have *tithes*.

Self-denial is an essential part of our Saviour's religion; *let a man deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me*; which was once understood to mean, that believers were not to be conformed to the world, nor to seek great things for *themselves*. But it has been found since to signify the *contrary*; that it is the highest degree of self-denial to enjoy a living of *several thousands a year*, and do no *mischief* with it; that there is more mortification in rich well *furnished tables*, when a man is able to afford them, than in *moderation, temperance, and abstinence*; that it is a better evidence of a true christian to behave well in the midst of *riches* than in *poverty*.—It will be owned that
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it is a rarer thing, but can never be a better evidence of true religion.

We have very little reason to challenge such as have their good things in this life, providing they did not live by oppressing others by unjust *claims* and *demands*: but when such as *make a shew of religion in will-worship* make others who are not concerned with them *bear the expence of it*, it is but reasonable to put them in mind of what they should be. Must good subjects be loaded like *asses* by *priests*, as the Jews were when *Jesus Christ* came into the world? When they ask *privileges* let them pay: if they pay his *majesty's* duty, what reason is there to pay for other people's religion, which they are not one grain the better of? When religion is turned into a *policy*, and made subservient to private interest,

rest, it will ever bring tyranny along with it. Oppression is inseparably connected with religion, when it is made the *tool of ambition*, and the *road of preferment*. I cannot easily understand, seeing the New Testament was given as the rule of direction for *gospel churches*, why providence did not concur to give us an *example* in what state of *preferment* the members of the church should be in: for if any of the several *establisments* of religion be *gospel churches*, there is no pattern of them in the New Testament. Antiquity makes nothing for this purpose when the scripture is silent.

To affect a state of dignity, riches, power and splendor, would require some *scripture precept* or *precedent* to authorize the attempt.

—But

— *But circumstances did not permit, the world was heathen, and religion had no magistrate to protect it.* That is all true, but God could have made his providence concur to have given us an example of the state churches should be in; or at least he could easily have told us in his word what he intended should be the highest *pitch* of church preferment.—If he has left it to the discretion of men, we cannot tell when it shall come to its height, nor is there any thing certain about it. As we have an example of *gospel churches* in the days of the *Apostles*, and there are no other prescribed in *scripture*, one would readily conclude there can be no other. It would be an accusation against the providence of God, to affirm, that the rules for preferment in his church were to settle after he withdrew the spirit of

of inspiration, without so much as leaving any hint that in the least favours any of these large societies called *national churches*. If men be to pay for the support of ecclesiastical dignities, it is but reasonable they have some authority given them for it, from the *New Testament*, otherwise, if the *magistrate pleased*, he might as well require us to support the *priests* of *Jupiter-hammon*, and it would equally bind the conscience of a believer of the *New Testament*, with the law for paying *tithes* to *bishops* and their *clergy*.

To pretend right to demand *church dues* from *dissenters* from the *church*, more than power gives, is to treat us like *asses*; both to *deprive* us of our *money* and our *senses*. Though men of any religion at all will not disobey the laws of the *magistrate*, yet they cannot,

not, unless they give up the use of their reason, believe that the *church* has any *other claim* but what the *magistrate* gives her; and even when they pay *dues* to such as it is his *majesty's pleasure* to honour, yet they cannot help both thinking, and saying, they are *ill applied*, and the *King* is *badly informed*. Christians, though they may bear their burdens with patience, when they can obtain no redress, yet they would be worse than *asses* to bear them *tamely*, when they may obtain *it*.

And one may venture to say, did the *dissenters* from the church of *England*, in a *body*, represent their case to the *Parliament*, they should obtain a deliverance from several *grievances* they *couch down* under. Could his *majesty*, and the great *council* of the nation, ever see it reasonable for peace-
able

able *subjects* to bear unreasonable burdens?—who, when they have the expence of their own way of worship to maintain, are also made to pay all the *ordinary expences* of the *establishment*? If that part of the subjects called *protestant dissenters* be fit for many purposes for the good of the nation in a *civil capacity*, why should they not enjoy as extensive *religious liberty*, as they do *civil privileges*? Or is there any reason why they should pay equally with the members of the church in the support of the established religion, which they cannot in conscience enjoy any benefit by?

Though that part of the subjects be burdened without their consent, as they cannot prevent or hinder the *legislator* from imposing upon them, as they have none to represent them in the great
council

council of the *nation*, yet it would be stupidity not to complain of their *grievances*, and seek *redress* by all *means* *lawful*.

It is undoubtedly, however, a *burden* upon such as *do not*, or *cannot*, in *conscience* join in the communion of the *church of England*, to be obliged to pay to support a worship they can see no warrant for from the New Testament.—But after imposing upon men's consciences, we need not think it strange that they impose upon our purses. What a weak religion must it be that stands in need of any thing to support it, but what proceeds from *voluntary consent*, and *good-will*? It is strange that the christian religion cannot maintain its ground by the same means that it gained it. Perhaps it may be said, that *inspiration* and the *extraordinary*

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providence of God made it gain Ground in the world, but when that is ceased there is need of *some other security*. Truly we may say we have changed much for the worse, if the *legal establishment* of religion has come in the place of God's *extraordinary assistance*.

But may it not as well be affirmed, that since the word of God is now compleated, and we have all the dictates of the Almighty's will *needful* to direct us into *all truth*, and the promise of his *Spirit* to lead us into it, that this is sufficient to secure religion till the *sound of the last trumpet*.—The most that human laws can do in securing religion, is to make men *say they are religious*. They never can reach the conscience, nor make any man believe a doctrine, till he have sufficient evidence for it.—Religion is as well secured

cured *without establishments* as with them, tho' the *livings* and *benefices* are *not*. The promise of God is a sufficient security for religion. The church is built upon the doctrine of the *Prephets* and *Apostles*, *Jesus Christ himself* being the *chief corner stone*.

In the days of the Apostles the church of God had not received the *New Testament oracles* into her possession.—The *Apostles* of *Christ* were sent as well to communicate the mind of the *Almighty* to the church, as to convert men to the christian religion. *Evangelists*, and other teachers, were also given by God, and sent by the Apostles to all the several places and churches where religion had taken up her residence.—These messengers of the *Apostles* were sent, and continued till the whole of the sacred oracles were given,

and received by the *church*: they were endowed with the spirit of infallible *interpretation*, as the Apostles were endowed with the spirit of *inspiration*. These *Elders, Teachers, or Evangelists*, had not any liberty to depart from the *apostolical instructions*, but were obliged to hold by the *form of sound words* which they received from the *Apostles*. Their use in the church was to determine what was or was not truly *apostolical*.

By these *Evangelists* the *christian church* was preserved from receiving any spurious writings of *impostors*, in the place of, or together with, the *dictates of divine inspiration*.—But when revelation was fully given, and received by the *church*, then was *religion established*;—and that word, which from the mouths of the *Apostles* converted
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so many to christianity, was left for their *establisment in the faith*, and for the *conversion* of others. There is no need of *inspiration* now, since we have all that the *Apostles* had, in their writings. That *armour of God* which the *Apostles* had, that was *mighty to pull down strong-holds and imaginations, that exalted themselves against the kingdom of God*, and which at *that time* was only in their hands,* is now committed to *all christians*. The *Apostle Paul* gives a sufficient reason why the *christian churches* may stand, and why they do so—they have the *whole armour of God, whereby they are able to resist the fiery darts of the wicked one*: by this *they stand fast in the evil day*. That whole passage deserves a place here: *Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in*

2 Cor. x. 14. Eph. vi. 11, 12, 13.

the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparations of the gospel of peace: above all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

Can there be a better *establishment* of religion than this, or any better security for christianity than the word of God? The word of God is unchangeable, and cannot alter; neither is it possible that the gates of hell can prevail against the church, though there was not an *establishment* in the world. The church is not at any loss for the want of inspiration, in that sense the
Apostle

Apostles had it, for in *that* sense she does not need it: the word of God is mighty for all the purposes of *edification* and *happiness* to the *church*, to the end of the world.

Such carnal weapons as *acts of parliament*, and *civil sanctions*, religion does not need, nor can they be applied unto it without destroying it.—*The weapons of our warfare* are not carnal, yet mighty to pull down. The weapons of defence the Apostles had, every christian is now fully in the possession of. The *decrees of councils*, and the *canons of the church*, are also but *carnal weapons*, often framed through the influence of *carnal policy*, by men who had too great a share in the management of *the kingdoms of this world*, to keep strictly to the rules of the *kingdom of Christ*. The most charitable construction that

can be put upon all that ever was done by men *in the way of forming laws of any kind*, in favour of religion, is, that they were building *hay and stubble* upon the *foundation* of the *Apostles*. What *Iffachers* would our *church guides* make us, to lay upon our *shoulders* such a heavy burden of *ecclesiastic constitutions, human creeds, and articles*, when every man that reads his *New Testament* may easily see the futility of their design? If we be the *disciples of men*, we are not the *disciples of Jesus Christ*.

Civil Burdens may be borne, but *religious slavery* is insupportable: to bear either tamely is an *afs-like* disposition. As to the first, when there is no remedy nor hopes of redress, it is *christian-like* to have patience, and be obedient to the powers that are in being: but

but it is *stupidity* to couch down and take a burden. When a burden is laid on by *violence*, or by the *iniquity of the times*, christians should be patient sufferers like *Christ*, and his *Apostles*: but when liberty can be obtained, it is *meanness* to couch down to *slavery*. If times permit, and laws allow christians to assert their *civil rights*, they should not depart from them through meanness of spirit. — Like *Paul*, they may tell such as endeavour to burden them, *they are free born*. — As to religious burdens, as they respect the conscience, they cannot be born at all: the consciences of men have but *one master*, and cannot yield obedience to any other. — It is not only *mean*, but *criminal*, to admit a *partner* with the *Almighty* in the government of *conscience*. Whether they be things that God hath commanded, or not, no man has a right to

to impose obedience upon us by any *human contrivance*. If they be commanded, let them shew the *authority*, and rest there, for it is superfluous to add to divine authority: if they are not commanded, it is *presumptuous* and *profane* to attempt to lay a burden upon a *subject*, that is only accountable to the great judge of all. Upon these principles of imposition, every man who imposes lays a snare for himself, when ever the times happen to change; for when ever the intolerant imposer loses his power, and that power falls into other hands, what can he expect, but to have his own measure returned back again unto him? There is no just reason for him to complain, however unjust it may be, for any other imposer to do as he hath done; for he is but now receiving the *same measure* he so liberally gave out *to others*. Who-
ever

ever insists upon having a right to oblige others to receive their religious opinions, upon the *pain* of any *loss* whatsoever, where the word of God gives no direction, must be accounted *infidels* towards God, and *oppressors* of mankind. When the word of God is given to make the man of God perfect, and is profitable *for all things* in religion, do they not accuse God of *folly*, and his word of *imperfection*, who make fences against *error*, which are accounted more fit to guard men against *heresy* than the *scriptures themselves*? And is it not treating men *like asses*, to tell them the scriptures are *profitable for all things* in matters of religion, and yet lay them under the necessity of receiving *dogmas* of human contrivance, to *preserve the purity of the faith*? This is a mere *Penelope's web*, a doing and undoing at the same time. What
occasion

occasion to introduce any other system of religion either with or besides the *scriptures*, if they be sufficient to make men perfect in *all things* pertaining to *godliness*? Do men think they can express themselves more intelligibly than the *Holy Spirit*, or commend the truth *more clearly* to other men's *consciences*?

The most that can lawfully be done with any *human composition*, however good it may be, is to leave it to men's *consideration*, and to suffer them to examine it by the *word of God*; but if they cannot find it consistent therewith, they are at liberty to reject it. The reason of all *civil* or *religious impositions* hath been the natural slothfulness of individuals, that could not be at pains to mind their own *business* and *private rights*. Mankind, in the several

veral ages of the world, have been like great men who give themselves to pleasure, and commit the care of their estates to the management of *stewards*, who at last become *masters*, and make their *masters* their *servants*. Such as are by the community exalted to *power* and *preferment*, unless they be wise and virtuous, except the several individuals which advanced them to power look also to their *administration*, they will be ready, like *Phæton*, who received the direction of his *father's chariot*, to set the world on fire. One cause of our present complaints, both as to *civil* and *religious oppression*, is, that *we look not to ourselves*, but think, as soon as we have elected civil or religious governors, we may *fall asleep* in pleasure, indolence, and inattention. There is no doubt but *governors* were designed for ease to the *public*, and when
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they *do their duty* they are a *public blessing* : but when they degenerate into *tyrants*, there is as much of the blame lies upon the *community* as upon *them* ; for had those who employed them *watched over them* as they ought, and given them timely admonition, they might have prevented them from ruining both their own *souls* and the *public interest*. The indolence and sloth of a people, are a temptation to governors to turn *usurpers*. In a free country like ours, where *commissioners to parliament* are elected by the *community*, and are not to be perpetual *dictators*, it would be easy to make them rule with discretion, by putting them in mind of the *shortness of their power*. We lose our liberty by not asserting it *properly*. It serves no purpose to cry out against the government, and the prime minister, when
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we are ourselves to blame.—When the time of a general *election* comes on, it is in the power of the subjects to assert their own liberty. When these men *who rule by their wealth*, and whose business it is to corrupt their fellow-subjects with *bribery*, and cheat them out of their liberty by *flattery* and *corruption*, come to ask your voices in their *election*, do you despise their offers, and say to them, *your money perish with you*. Can it be supposed that such men will take care of your *interests*, who want to ruin your *souls*; who begin with debauching your morals with *drunkenness* and *perjury*. Will that man have the least regard for your civil interest and property, who first attempts to ruin your virtue? Will he ever scruple to betray the liberties of his country, who teaches *perjury*, and follows *bribery* and *corruption*?—It is at best a bad beginning,

ning, when men mount to *preferment* by means of *bribery* and *false swearing*. What better is a *county*, a *city*, or a *borough*, than a *community of asses*, that suffer themselves to be cheated out of their privileges, by any *duke*, *knight*, or *squire*, that comes to *water them*? When any of these, who offer themselves candidates to *counties* and *towns*, to be elected members of *parliament*, come to solicit votes, by making whole *towns swim in drunkenness*, what opinion must these gentlemen have of such *drunken societies*, who will do so much for a few days of *riot* and *gluttony*, as to *sell their liberties*, but that they are *asses that want to be watered*? Can that nation be accounted free, that can be so easily enslaved by *drunkenness* and *bribery*? Liberty is but a name, when it can be so easily subdued by such mean gratifications. When men are slaves to
their

their lusts, they will never be free. Men that do so easily *sell their souls* will not value their country.—Where there is not virtue, there can be no liberty—it is only licentiousness. Liberty is an high-sounding name in *Britain*, and there are, I dare say, more slaves in it, *according to the privileges it enjoys*, than there are in *Constantinople*.—And with this aggravation, that they know how to prevent it. What *Issachers* are these *towns* and *corporations*, that give their votes to a *member of parliament* who neither fears God nor loves them; who, by the method he pursues to obtain an election, deserves to forfeit the favour and esteem of all the lovers of virtue and honesty. Whom can they blame for their oppression but themselves? Their own hands do make the fetters by which they are bound. Can the *disturbers* and *debauchers* of

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cities,

cities, towns, and corporations, be fit men to sit in the great council of these nations? — Who, during the drunken revels of several weeks and months, ruin more morals, and corrupt more minds, than ever their service is worth to the common-weal.

It appears something strange, that men cannot be supposed to be free to make choice of one to represent them in the *high assembly* of the *nation*, till they be made slaves to *drunkenness* and *corruption*. It were sufficient to make all good subjects abhor a man that offered such an *insult to their virtue*, as to attempt to overcome it before they would solicit their *election*. These *towns, counties, and corporations*, richly deserve a burden of *heavy taxes* upon their *window lights*, and *other property*, who give up the light of their *understand-*
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ing to venal corruption. Those who have laid out so much money upon an *election*, will endeavour to make you pay for it, by joining with some *venal ministry in taxing you*, for the benefit of a rich *preferment*. Had the several members of *cities, towns, and counties*, consulted their own happiness and interest, as truly as they have sometimes made a *noise* about them, they might have prevented many heavy impositions that they now labour under. — Had they made it their business to chuse *worthy and good men* to represent them in *parliament*, with an *assurance* that they would ever support them, while they made it their study *to maintain their liberties*; but on the other hand would despise every such person as should *betray the interest of his constituents*, and the *welfare of his country*, for any *place, pension, or pre-*
G 2 *ferment,*

ferment, they might have hereby laid some restraint upon the *venal disposition of such as make a trade of selling their country*, for a *place or pension* under an *aspiring minister*. The assurance that they should never again be elected by any *county, city, town, or corporation*, if they joined in bringing them under any *burden and slavery*, would be a check upon them, to hinder them from going into all the *schemes of a minister* to hurt their fellow-subjects. But what have men to expect from *such candidates*, who offer themselves to serve their country, *but begin with corrupting their morals*, that they may remove from their minds *all sense of virtue*, that they may the better *make a sale of their privileges*. These corrupt members of the commonwealth know how to pacify those whose interest *they have betrayed in parliament*. — It is only to do

do what they do every time they are elected, to make *towns* and *cities* revel in *drunkenness* for so many days and weeks, and to *bribe* some *few* who have influence to lead the rest. After this they depart to their old employment, with the character of THE BEST MEN IN THE WORLD. It requires no more but that they occasionally *water* their *asses*, to make them true beasts of burden, and cause them to stoop down patiently and take them on. If some are more obstinate than the rest, and will not be tractable enough *with an ordinary quantity of good liquor*, they know how to manage such *asses*—they silence their *noise* with *some gift* that is suited to their disposition. *Issachar's* character is truly applicable to the *inhabitants of Britain*—they are *strong asses*, that *love rest* and *ease*, and *couch down* under heavy burdens.

Were not the greatest part of these kingdoms of *Issachar's* character, could they sit easy under *taxes*, the most unreasonable in the world? Are there not many things fitter for bearing taxation than the necessaries of life? The poorest man that lives, cannot live without *meat* and *drink*, *shoes* and *light*—yet he must pay heavy duty for the *sun* that *shines* in at his window, for the *beer* he drinks, the *candle* he makes use of, and for the very *shoes* upon his feet.—Those who opposed the *cyder* act, and obtained the repeal thereof after it was past, were truly *sons of liberty*.—They were like *Neptthali*, *hinds* let loose; and not like *Issachar*, *strong asses*, couching down under unreasonable burdens and oppression. We have certainly as good right to drink *beer* without heavy *excise*, as they have to drink *cyder*.—Britons, you will

will soon have it in your power to enjoy the *same freedom* as these your fellow-subjects.—When the general *election* comes on, chuse *no man* for a *member of parliament*, who will not give you *security* that he will stand up for a *repeal* of those *several laws that oppress* you.—If you remain still under your burdens, it must be your own fault.—You will stand recorded for *asses* to all generations, if you do not assert your liberties when you have it in your power. It is not *disloyalty* to your *King*, nor any way injurious to the *constitution* and *laws* of your *country*, to give *instructions* to the *candidates* you chuse for your *members of parliament*, and take their *obligation* that they will follow these instructions.—This will be more noble than taking *bribes*, and more profitable than *rioting a few days* in *gluttony* and *drunkenness*.—Members of par-

liament are *your servants*, and the *servants of their country*; it is but reasonable they be made accountable for their conduct.—*Give them their instructions*, and require them to keep by them. When any *duke or lord, knight or squire*, come with their *drunken rabble of attendants*, to solicit your votes by *treats and entertainments*, put them in mind what they are about, and what they ought to be.—Tell them that none who make attempts upon other men's virtue can be faithful to their *Liberties and interest*.—Shun them, as you would do the *Pestilence*, lest you suffer them to corrupt your virtue.—Remember that there cannot a greater plague enter a *city*, than such as seek to stain the virtue of the inhabitants.

Is it not strange to see a whole *town and corporation* flocking about a man
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for some *private emolument* to individuals, at the expence of the public welfare, each concealing from his neighbour his real intention, that he may *serve* or *please himself* with some *base gratification*? That same person who thus endeavours to corrupt you, and is at great expence to do it, will no doubt make you *pay for it soundly, by taxing you severely*.—That money he is obliged to lay out to obtain your election, he knows how to bring back to himself, *with interest, at your expence*.—It appears to me exceeding plain, that all the *towns and counties in Britain* have borne the expence of their own elections these several sessions of parliament. These two articles—*window-cess* and the *duty upon ale and beer*, for fourteen years back, I presume, sufficiently compensate for the expence of the *election jobbers*.—I shall, perhaps, hear it said, that this is applied
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to *the use of the government*.—I own it is very true;—but it is to pay a number of *pensioners*, that ruined themselves first by *elections*, and have since been *better endowed* than ever they were before.—It would be thought, perhaps, invidious to produce examples—but there are many to be found. A gentleman may safely sink his estate by *procuring an election*, when he can afterwards buy another, ten times better than that which he had before. They are in this respect *like other traders*, who, when they fail, very often *make a profitable composition* at other people's expence, and grow richer than ever they were before.

It would undoubtedly be a good method to do with the *candidates* for *elections*, as is done with the military on these occasions; to keep *them* and
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their agents a stage distant from the place of the election till it was decided. In this respect it would be free : but there can be no true liberty where people are not left indifferent to make a choice *purely upon the principles of virtue.*

Men will not readily submit to any bondage till they be corrupted. The way that has been taken in all ages to enslave mankind, has been first *to overcome their virtue.* As long as the *Romans* were virtuous, they enjoyed freedom and liberty : but when *luxury, bribery, and corruption* were introduced, virtue declined, and *Rome* was enslaved. It is vain to talk of freedom when we are slaves to our passions : such as have art to manage these springs of action, will easily make us slaves by our own consent, and by taking hold of *something*

thing within us, insensibly lead us into bondage. One would readily think that such as offered their service to their country, intended the welfare thereof; but when they set out on their enterprize, by first overcoming, or seeking to overcome, the *virtue* of their *fellow-subjects*, it is a *bad omen*, and gives ground of *suspicion*, that something beside *public happiness* is the reason of their conduct. When a man to whom providence hath given a liberal share of worldly possessions, and who is able by the weight of his interest to weigh down the fourth part of a county, employs that interest contrary to the *principles of honesty and virtue*, any person of the least discernment may see that he is a *curse to the nation*. When men's votes are solicited, or *purchased*, or when such as are in *some dependance upon a superior*, are overawed in their voting, the person whom they

they chuse is not freely elected. The men of large fortunes treat their dependants *like asses*, and *threaten* them out of their *liberty* and *virtue* at once, by the weight of their interest. In strict speaking, there is no man free, according to the present rules of elections, but men of large and extensive fortunes. The power of chusing a man to represent a *town* or *county* in *parliament*, is lodged in the hands of a few *monopolizers of privileges*, who, by the weight of their *purses*, and the *power* of their *interest*, can turn the rest as they have a mind. *Britons*, are you sensible what you are doing, when for some *small favour*, or *sordid gratification*, you sell your votes to such as want to inflave your country.—You are publishing to all the world that you *are asses*, ready and willing to take on any burden.

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The meanness of the greatest number of freeholders in *Britain*, is conspicuous in their stooping down to take on every burden that any over-grown *duke* or *knight* pleases to impose upon them.—When once it is known what side of the question *his grace is on*, the inferior freeholders ask no more, but generally say, *Amen*. They do not consider the *qualifications* and *merit* of the candidate, whether he is a *wise man* or a *fool*, an *honest man* or a *knave*, a *friend* to his *country* or a *tool* of the *state*: if he is such a great man's friend, that is sufficient. In this conduct of *British* freeholders, we may also see the character of several of their members of parliament;—when men who have a right to elect one to represent them in the great council of the nation have no concern for their own
interest,

interest, but elect *by chance* any one that a superior recommends, they have no reason to think that the man whom they have chosen will pay any more regard to their interest than they have done themselves;—they will be ready to vote in parliament *with as much indifference about the interest of their constituents, as they did for them in the general election*: as they have had occasion to learn from the conduct of the nation in general, how *little* they value their *liberties* and *property*, by intrusting *them* in the hands of men they did know, nor endeavoured to know, *they* find they can with more safety dispose of *them* to *their own advantage*, at the call of a minister, for a good consideration.

Who is to blame for the heavy load of taxes that the nation groans under, but

but the very people who pay them? Had they been careful in chusing *honest* and *fit men* to manage their *interests* at *court*, who are possess'd of love for their country, and the happiness of those they represented, they would have stood up for their *interest*, and declared against all imposition.—It is men's own indolence and inattention that ruin them.

The remedy against these burdens is evident, men ought sincerely to look after their own interests.—From a principle of disinterested love to the public, every man that enjoys possessions should take care of them, as a trust committed to him, for which he is accountable.—Not as accountable only to himself, by considering what he possesses to be his own, which he may dispose of at his pleasure, but as intrusted by providence with something that the public
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lic has a concern in. A kingdom under a government like ours, is like an estate put into the hands of a number of *stewards*, who, though they have their reward for their service, yet are obliged to act for the good of the whole. The right exercise of their liberty consists in *supporting private right*, for the sake of *public happiness*. When individuals cease to take care of their special *departments*, as supporters of public liberty, they will degenerate into *indifference*, or *selfish principles*. As much depends upon wise *legislation* to make men free and happy ; as laws, when formed, must affect every individual ; it must be necessary in the first degree, to have wise men appointed to act in the *legislature*. Burdens must be taken off in the same manner they were laid on : and as selfish and corrupt members of *parliament* were the

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instruments of imposing burdens upon the nation, wise, virtuous, and disinterested ones, must be the *instruments* of removing them. Instead of fruitless complaints against the government, when it is not in your power to help the evil, let it be your study, *Britons*, now when it is in your power, to apply an *effectual remedy*.—Chuse none of those for your representatives at the general election, *who concurred in laying burdens upon you before*.—Suffer them to stand as *beacons*, for posterity to take warning from. Shall the freeholders of *Britain* again chuse such unworthy members of society to manage their public affairs, they may expect to have their *burdens continued*, and fixed more firmly upon their *shoulders*. You may always suspect every one that wants to corrupt you: *the same person* will also endeavour to load you with heavy burdens.

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The whole nation, by this time, may know who were the *tools of the ministry* in the last session of parliament. *Set a mark upon them*, that ages to come may hold their *memories* in *abhorrence*. Let it be known, that *Britain* knows *how to reward the worthy*, and *despise the worthless*. Would *England* desire to get free of some heavy and grievous burdens, which the poor, and even the middle ranks of mankind groan under, let them endeavour to make choice of men to represent them in *parliament*, who will be as zealous to get them freed from oppression, as their former representatives were to impose burdens upon them. It will be more honourable to give your vote for a member of *parliament*, upon his *promise* to stand up for the repeal of oppressive *acts* of the legislature, than to take a *petty bribe*, or some naughty

private consideration : it will be more honourable to engage your representative to convey the *voice* and *sense* of his *constituents* to the audience of the *legislature*, than to chuse him for some *private emolument*, or *sordid advantage*, to some individuals. May not Britain cry and utter her voice, and say she will not be any longer *enslaved* or *oppressed*? May not *counties*, *towns*, and *corporations* give instructions to such as they make choice of for *public servants*? And may they not make it a *condition* of *their election*, that their members *assert their privileges*, and cry loud for a *repeal of all oppressive laws*? The *cider counties* have set you an *example* : they cried, and they were heard. The *Americans* gained the *repeal* of the *stamp act* by a vigorous *resistance of oppression*.—Have the rest of Britain no burdens they want to have

have removed? Are there none of the necessaries of life taxed, which much affect the poor mechanic, and the mercantile part of the nation? Now is the time to exert themselves. Take care, you who have it in your power to do justice to yourselves, and a real service to your country, *whom you give your votes for.* Shall any one solicit your votes, because he judges himself qualified *with so many hundreds or thousands of yearly income*, ask him if he has a good conscience, and a lover of his country. Shall he tell you that he is approved of by so many of the *principal freeholders in the county*, or the *members of a city*, tell him you judge for yourselves, and do not walk by the light of other men. Was he a member before, consider what measures he fell in with: was he a *patriot* or not; or was he the *dupe* of the *ministry* or a *tool*

of the *court*, mark him down *blank*, and tell him to mind his business, for you cannot serve them. Such as have *honestly served their country*, encourage them; let your election be no expence to them. Even prevent such with your votes, and desire their *further good offices*.—Shall *Britain* take care to have the great assembly of the nation filled with *good, honest, and faithful patriots*, then may she expect to get free of *burdens and oppression*.—But shall every dull d—e, and heavy-headed k——t, whom providence has *curs'd* with a *large estate*, have it in their power to impose one of *their friends and creatures* upon you for a member of *Parliament*, you may say, *farewel to liberty*, and couch down under your burdens; like *Issachar* you will stand recorded in the *annals of future ages for asses*.

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With regard to religious bondage and oppression, as it respects chiefly *dissenters* from the *establishment*, it will not be so easy to get it removed.— But certainly the laity of *Britain* have more good sense than not to see the *absurdity* of several ecclesiastic impositions upon that part of his majesty's subjects. It is not likely that the established clergy will ever give their consent to any law that shall ever be made for the *relief of protestant dissenters*: they will no doubt consider that *their relief* will be *their disadvantage*. —But the *clergy* are not the *majority* in *parliament*, nor does *wisdom*, *charity*, and *humanity* dwell alone with them. Reason has of later times often triumphed over severe statute laws.— May not *dissenters* make a trial, and represent their case to the high court

of the nation? The laity who sit in that *assembly are friends to reason and common sense*, and will undoubtedly listen to the grievances of faithful subjects. Is it not unreasonable that subjects who are ready on all occasions to serve the government, should bear such a mark of slavery, as to be obliged *to pay for their heads every year to a church they cannot in conscience join with?* Is it reasonable to pay for the benefit of the *atmosphere*, to receive the *smoke* of their *chimnies*, to a church they cannot ask any privileges from, *from a principle of conscience?* Are *dissenters* free, when they are obliged to perform the office of *church-wardens*, in a church they cannot communicate with, without *wounding their own consciences*, and betraying their *sincerity?* It could not be constructed *disloyalty*, for the whole body of *protestant dissenters*

senters to join in an *address* to the *parliament*, for the *removal* of the *causes* of their *grievances*: there is some reason to expect they would be heard; at least it would shew they were not like *Issachar*, *asses* *couching* *down* *under* *a* *heavy* *burden* *voluntarily*.—It would shew to the world the nobleness of their spirit, in striving to get free of oppression.—*Occasional conformity* for *posts* under the government, is a burden very unreasonable: it ought not to be required, and should not be complied with. Cannot an *oath* of *fidelity* and *allegiance* to the *sovereign* give security to the state of a man's *loyalty*, without taking the *sacrament* upon it? Can there be any reason for such an imposition in *nature*, or *revealed religion*? It would be better to tell *dissenters* that they shall have no *preferments* under the government at all, than clog them with
such

such conditions.—Such as comply occasionally must be *men of no principle*: they must dissent from no principle of conscience, who have liberty to use such freedoms. It is not a light matter for men to have a call to serve their country, and their sovereign, and be obliged *to give up conscience, or refuse the call.* This is at least leading men into temptation. May not *protestant dissenters* supplicate their *superiors*, and *earnestly intreat* them to consider their *burdens*? They have undoubtedly some property in the nation, and bear their own share in the expence of government; it can be no *presumption* to ask what is reasonable. They should join mutually in *petitioning his majesty*, and the *high assembly* of the nation, for a hearing of their grievances. I flatter myself their joint cry for liberty *would be heard.* Whatever are our
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burdens, let us take *honest* and *honourable steps* to have them removed. Instead of *clamours* against the court; instead of *mobs, riots, and commotions*, let the oppressed *ask orderly*, and they shall receive. If they cannot obtain redress, they will have the satisfaction to reflect, that they have not *taken on their own burdens*. Providence will some time favour their attempts.—But if, like *Isachar*, they peaceably couch down and take on their own burdens, they will find many ready to *impose upon them*.

SERMONS

TO

ASSES.

SERMON III.

NUMB. xxii. 21—30.

And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab.—And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine?

THERE are several methods of preaching in practice among the several professors who pretend to *that* gift:

gift:—but the chief seem to be these two.—To make some text of scripture either the *foundation* or *occasion* of their discourse. It answers much the same purpose, whether a sermon be taken from the *text*, or suggested by means thereof. I imagine my readers will easily conceive which of these methods I have observed in this discourse. *Balaam rose up in the morning and saddled his ass*.—There must be some matter of importance in hand, when a man of *Balaam's* character is up so early. *Some pious purpose, no doubt*, is to be executed when a *prophet* rises so soon in the morning. You will be surprized to hear that *the anger of the Lord was kindled against the prophet*.—There was a reason for it:—*Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness*, and rose with a design to curse a blessed people to procure them.

Alas!

Alas ! the *whole creation groaneth and is in bondage until now* ; — the meanest animal is brought into slavery by the iniquities of man. Men of deep designs, and profound politics, will make use of any instrument to obtain their ends. — *When a man is riding to the devil, an ass will serve the purpose as well as a horse.* Our covetous prophet had now a great object in his eye : — the *King of Moab* had promised to exalt him to *riches and honour*, if he would curse the *children of Israel*, and it is no wonder that a man of *Balaam's* disposition was up early in the morning to look after them. — *It was to serve a king too.* — The leaders in all nations, in all ages, have been well-disposed to serve the great. I have read of *bishops* who have been employed the same way. — But how shall he curse whom

whom God hath blessed? What did the *King of Moab* mean, by asking *Balaam* to curse *Israel*?—*Superstition* has been very early in the world:—such as had no just notions of the true God, had yet some notions of a supreme power to bless and curse.

Balaam seems to have been one of the *Eastern Magi*, and one of those who pretended to be hand and glove with some powerful *divinity*,—whose aid he could call in at his pleasure, to bless or curse whom he had a mind. It is very likely this was all a perversion and corruption of the religion of the true God, which was made use of to serve the *pious purposes of false prophets, and the politics of princes*.—The greatest part of the leading men of this world, in almost every age, have meant no more by religion, than to
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make it an *engine of state policy*, or a *tool of secular interest*. Men of any degree of sagacity can easily see that the common people will not always be subject to their authority, unless they be brought under it by *means of temporal advantage*, or *the influence of religion*: and as they who aspire after power are seldom disposed to part with *many worldly emoluments*, they endeavour to gain the obedience of the vulgar with what costs them nothing, and what they themselves *set no value upon*. Severe as this reflection may seem upon *human legislators*, experience hath for a long time confirmed it;—and it is evident from observation, that the greatest part of those who have wanted to bring over religion to their side, have made use of it to serve the ends of their *pride and ambition*. It is difficult, if not impossible, to govern mankind with-

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out *some form of religion*;—for it may be found by observation, that where there is least religion, or where it is most perverted, there is generally the greatest barbarity among the inhabitants of any country.—Where the knowledge of the Deity is well-nigh obliterated in the minds of a people, they differ but little from other *animals*;—they are rude, savage, and untractable, till they are instructed in the knowledge of *religion*.

I must observe here, that although *princes* have made religion an *engine of government* to manage their subjects by, yet they could never so far prevail over *priests* and *prophets*, as to make them subservient to the ends of their policy, without allowing them to go *snacks with them in the profits that arise from it*.

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It would appear, from considering the influence of religion upon mankind, that it is necessary to their *very constitution, in a civilized capacity*,—for without it they differ but little from *brutes*.—The best civil policy cannot subsist without it;—for where religion is once removed, there is neither *law* nor *policy*. Religion softens the mind, and makes it capable of impressions that men are strangers to without it:—without it we have no proper springs of action to excite us to what is truly noble and virtuous. Some men may have a sort of animal docility, and be more easily kept in order than others, but without religion they are at best *but a milder sort of savages*.

It is a pity, however, it should be made subservient to base ends and pur-

poses:—it seems to be the chief end of our nature, and should be the chief aim of our conduct.—To it all other things should be made subservient;—and it is no sign of the soundness of the human œconomy, when the *mistress is made a dupe to her handmaids*. It is a strong argument of the usefulness of religion, that generally all men, in *the time of distress*, make her their *dernier resort*.

What kings find themselves unable to do by force of arms, they sometimes think may be done by the *Deity* without them.—This is a fair, but a forced acknowledgment of *human impotence*, and of the *independence* of the *Deity*.

Whatever may have been said by *travellers*, perhaps there are no people in the world but do worship a *Deity*,
under

under the characters of either *good* or *bad*. The human mind seems to be formed for religion; and notwithstanding of the wrong bias that *habit* and *custom* do often give the minds of men, yet the very errors and excesses of mankind shew what way the mind would exercise herself, if she were once clear of those *fetters* and *manacles* that hold her.

Were there as many to instruct us in the *ways of righteousness*, as there are to seduce us into the *paths of error* and *falsehood*, perhaps we would find matters very different from what they are. When *civil* and *religious rulers* are engaged in one interest to seduce mankind, if the *Almighty himself* were not at the head of the *administration*, it is hard to say where the end might be. It is observable, that every man, rich

and poor, when they are in distress, if they enjoy the exercise of their reason, *want to bring over the Deity to their interest*:—but often the means that they make use of to accomplish their end, deserve to be classed among the number of *their provocations*.—No man ought to ask from God what will ruin another: for when the *Almighty* gives a favour to one, it does not incapacitate him to give another man the same, if he knows he stands in need of it. *Curses*, above all things, are most disagreeable to a good and merciful God.—What, O *Balak*, didst thou mean, to send for a prophet to curse a people that had not yet injured thee? Good God! what would become of thy *Israel*, if the *King of Moab* had power? They would be all destroyed in a moment.

It

It is well for the world that God is the supreme governor of it, whose *laws are love, and his government mercy.* The *King of Moab* must have been very ignorant of the character of that God that rules the universe, to think that he had not an equal good-will to the same works of his hands.—Perhaps he had been taught the doctrine of a good and evil genius: one that could curse and another that could bless. At this time he wanted the aid of the evil genius, to distribute *maledictions* among a people he was afraid of. Fear and hatred are very closely allied, *quisquis timet quanquam est intactus & odit.*

When matters go on pleasantly with wicked men, they forget their God; but when they find their own incapacity to bear their burdens, they would wil-

lingly *throw them upon the Almighty.*
—This they do not out of love, but fear.

There are many men in the world that have the same opinion of *God*, that they have of the *Devil*;—that he is disposed to do ill to them that are his enemies. Their notions of good and evil are much the same, and therefore their *God* and their *Devil* must have the same character. Their notions of good are, *that it is fit they do what they please, without punishment,* and follow the bent of their own inclination with impunity.—And they mean no more by evil, than punishment for their offences. It is goodness to suffer them to continue as they are, and it is evil to interrupt them in the gratification of their *appetites* and *passions*. Virtue is not good to them, and
vice

vice evil ; but *punishment is evil, and impunity good.*

The King of *Moab* and his prophet *Balaam* have now the character of some *demon* in their eye.—He must curse *Israel*, or he does nothing. What malignity must there be in some men's temper, that they cannot rest satisfied, but with the destruction of their fellow-creatures ? Had thy children, *Balak*, all died in that battle where thy friend *Balaam* fell, and all his children perished with himself, the world would have had no cause to lament the loss. But the case is otherwise. Thy offspring, like *Pharaoh's locusts*, overspread all the kingdoms of *Europe*. From *thee* and thy prophet *Balaam*, statesmen have learned to curse their enemies, and to ask the aid of *prophets* to support their cause. From *Balaam*

laam churches have taken the hint of devoting such to *eternal destruction*, as will not join in their common creed, to support *the common craft*. How has the name of the *Deity* been profaned by malevolent invocations, to curse thousands that have been dear in his sight? The *leaders of state and church policy* have ever acted upon the same principle. What cannot be so easily effected by reason and strength of argument, has often been obtained by *curses and church anathemas*.

It is a long time since *statesmen* have found need of the assistance of *some Deity*, and *churchmen* have pretended interest enough to procure it,—yet the first have often *been disappointed*, and the latter *found to be liars*. The God of this universe has more mercy and goodness, than to hear the prayers of
either

either civil or religious *politicians*, who only make use of his assistance to serve their *own pride and ambition*. Worldly interest has ever been the *chief bond of alliance* between *churchmen* and *statesmen*,—and to serve this *pious purpose* they have abused both the characters of *God and the Devil*.

We can find authentic accounts of two parties near *Dunbar*, in the time of the *usurpation*, ready to shed one another's blood *in the name of the Lord*,—and both confidently assured of success, by their *prophets* that consulted their *oracles*. Could it be the God of heaven that *these enthusiasts* consulted, and from whom they affirmed they had received assurance of success? If so, they must either have mistaken his meaning, or he deceived some of them. I am afraid the prophets were like *Balaam*

laam, and the rulers like *Balak*, who went to curse their enemies, but God turned it unto a blessing;—not for the deserts of *them that prospered*, but for the *impertinence and impiety of them who suffered*.

There seems to be one reason why wicked men in the time of difficulty seek the assistance of some *invisible Deity*:—they chuse not to have it thought that they depend upon any *visible agent*. All men in the time of prosperity affect a sort of *independence*, and would be *Deities if they could*. When distress comes upon them, they are stimulated by pride, not to acknowledge their dependance upon such as they have accounted their inferiors:—they betake themselves therefore to some *invisible Divinity*, which their consciences tell them *some-where existeth*,
but

but which they have neglected to acknowledge till distress urged them to it. They only give up their notions of *independence*, when they can no longer support them *with any credit*. — This is the most honourable way of retreating they can think on, to acknowledge a power which they would willingly suppose the rest of mankind have *not so much interest with as themselves*.

Thus wicked men change *atheism* for *hypocrisy* : — for when they find themselves under some necessity to acknowledge a *Deity*, they at the same time incline to monopolize his favour, and pretend they are *his greatest intimates* : — when at the same time they rather make use of these pretences to serve their own ends and purposes, than

than sincerely behave as the *friends of God*.

When men are obliged to renounce any degree of their own *independence*, they would willingly do it with as much regard to their *notions of dignity* as they could,—and it is for this reason when they are disposed to depend upon the *Almighty*, that they always incline to make the world believe that *Him* and *them* are *very familiar*:—that though they dare not consider themselves his superior, yet they would willingly be *as near equal to him* as they possibly could. Hence it is, that false *prophets* and *enthusiasts* of all sorts have always given out what influence they had with their *Divinities*, that one would almost conclude, that they durst not do any thing without *their good leave*, nor refuse any thing

thing *they had a mind to ask*. Such an opinion as this *Balak* seems to have had of the *false prophet Balaam*:—for, says he, *whom thou bleffest is bleffed, and whom thou cursest is cursed*.

This *prophet* affected *Divinity* as long as he could,—till the *Almighty* made him understand that his *divinations* were under his controul, and then he was obliged to confess that *he could do nothing beyond the commandment of the Lord*. Mankind in general make as great a secret of their *dependance* upon God as they possibly can, and in the capital points of their *dependance*, pretend that none knows it but *God and themselves*. This seems to be the reason why some *devout people* do not consider intercourse with God as a common privilege, but peculiar to them.

themselves, *as the favourites of heaven.* If men were entirely satisfied in their own minds with their *dependance* upon God, they would make no secret of it, but humbly confess it on every occasion:—but when they want to wrap it up *in mysticism*, and conceal it under *some form of divination*, it still says they are not satisfied, whatever they pretend. It seems to be more the disposition of mankind to be *Divinities*, than to seek after intercourse with God. The heathens had a *ruling propensity* of this sort;—they affected divine honours, and wanted to be accounted *Deities*; yet this was seldom conferred upon them *till after they were dead.*—And the reason seems to have been, that there were so many affecting the same thing, that they could not endure a *Divinity* they saw with their eyes

eyes in their own nature, because it so far destroyed *every man's private opinion of self-dependance.*

It will be found, upon strict enquiry into the human heart, that the same ambition that excited our *first parents* to seek to be as Gods, makes all *their posterity*, while they are not governed by the influence of the *gospel*, to affect the same thing. When the mind is once perverted, no man will seek to be virtuous *of his own accord*:—and unless he be persuaded by *arguments* that are more powerful than his prejudices, he will continue in the same condition into which he was seduced.

I was observing, that the human mind is some way or other formed for *religion*.—This is evident upon occasions; which shews, that whatever perversity
K there

may be in it by *seduction*, its original form was quite the reverse. The infidelity of the mind does not arise from its nature, but from an evil seed, *that was sown by an enemy*, which, when it grows up, over-rules *the springs of action*, and causeth men to act unnaturally.

There is nothing more unnatural than *atheism* and *infidelity* : for both *the works and word of God* do teach us, that *dependance upon the Almighty is the language of nature*. Till the mind be rightly informed, she is incapable of forming *right moral principles*, and without the benefit of revelation will either fall into *superstition* or *enthusiasm*, if not into *infidelity* :—but this is a perversion of nature, and not the original design of the mind. When men so far depart from the first prin-

principles of nature as to affect *independency*, the reason is, they are *corrupted and perverted*. *Danger or affliction* will produce feelings which will stagger men's notions of *self-dependance*, but unless they are set right by *divine revelation*, they will land in *superstition and enthusiasm*. The reason why the heathens fell so grossly into *superstition*, was, they wanted a guide to reform their minds from that perversity of temper that all men are possessed of, till *revelation* discover to them the errors of their hearts.

At the same time that men are attempting to seduce others, and endeavouring to support superstition, they are often insensibly *themselves infected with the same distemper*.—*Balak*, who no doubt attempted to impose upon the people of *Moab* the foolish *superstition*

of these times, *as a tool of state, and an engine of government, was himself infected with the same delusion.*—He applies to *Balaam* for his aid in the time of his distress. This *Balaam* seems to have been a man of great repute among the superstitious people of these parts. I observed already, that most likely he was one of the *Eastern Magi*, one who pretended intimacy with *some Divinity*,—who needed only some few compliments paid to him, and then would work wonders in favour of his friends. One would think that the *Eastern Kings* had not been very intimate with their *deities*, when they had so far to send for a *mediator*:—perhaps in these times *Kings* had other business to mind than religion, unless upon very special occasions, and were therefore not so well acquainted with the manner of addressing the *deities*.
Be

Be this as it will, *Balak* sent *messen-*
gers to *Balaam*, to come to him to
curse a people he was much afraid of.
The curse was perhaps some form of
incantation, that was usual in these
times, which ignorant people believed
was powerful to hurt their *enemies*;
—yet might for all that be innocent
enough to every person whatsoever, ex-
cept the *persons* who used it.

The *King* of *Moab* seems to have
had some confidence in *Balaam's* abi-
lities, and also knew what would be
the *best excitement* for him to exercise
them.—He promises him *honours*, and
very liberal *rewards*.—If the *King* of
Moab was not well acquainted with
the disposition of the *Deity*, he seems
to have known mankind *tolerably*:—
at least, he seems to have known *Ba-*
laam's leading principle. Perhaps the

prophet's character was well known, as a man that never chose to work *for nothing*,—and *Balak* might learn this from *report*.

The *prophet* seemed well-disposed at first to serve the *King of Moab*, for the *considerations* proposed to him, but had one *objection* in his way,—that tho' he *would*, he *could not* get over it. It is likely he had found by *experience* that there was a *supreme agent*, that upon occasions had interrupted the influence of his *divinations*;—*Him* he wanted first to consult, lest upon trial he should come off with disgrace in the middle of his *enterprize*.—He goes first to consult the *Lord*.

When men go to ask the mind of the *Almighty*, with their hearts *fully bent* upon their *own purposes*, it is no great

great wonder if they receive an answer not *quite favourable* to their *inclinations*. God who knows all things, well knew with what intention his suppliant at this time did address him; —not with a full resolution to *submit* to *his will*, but with a desire that God would favour *his designs* at *all events*. He was forbidden *to go* with *Balak's messengers*, —which was not a pleasing answer to a man that loved the *wages of unrighteousness*. *Balak* behaved towards the *prophet*, as the *prophet* did towards *his maker*. —He tried him *again*. The *King of Moab* had indeed better reason to urge *Balaam*, than the *prophet* had to be *instant* with the *Almighty*. —This covetous *prophet* had shewed his *good inclination* to *serve him*, but told he *could not*: —and what did *Balak* know but the *Deity* might change *his mind*, and by *importunity* yield to

Balaam's entreaties. The heathen notions of *God* differed *but little* from their notions of *men*.—But *Balaam* knew that he had received an exprefs answer in the *negative*, and behaved *presumptuously* in importuning his *maker*.—It would seem that he wanted to insult his *maker* into his design. He tries him *again*.—Ah! what *impiety* to ask what *God* had *peremptorily* refused! *But there was money and honour in the case*, which to a mind like *Balaam's* were strong reasons of conduct.—

But it is wonderful that *any man* not quite metamorphosed into a *devil*, could ask the *Almighty* for liberty to curse his own creatures. Such an address to *God* could not well be expected to receive any other answer *but a refusal*. Will a *good, gracious, and merciful God* hear the prayers of a man that breaths
nothing

nothing but *curfes* and *ruin* to a people that had never injured him? Had this prophet been *Bishop* of *Rome*, or a *member* of *some modern associations*, we might perhaps have concluded that he meant *to save their souls*, by giving *their flesh* to the *devil*: but *church authority* was not likely *then* known in that eastern part of the world. Perhaps the *church rulers* in after-times took *the hint* from *Balaam*, in their excommunicating people they did *not like*, or *were afraid of*. The *prophet's* method of cursing would no doubt be pretended to be clothed *with divine authority*, and accounted a *religious act* among these eastern *superstitious* nations.

The *prophet* was at last permitted to go with the *messengers* of the *King* of *Moab*, but with a *restraint* upon him that did not well *suit* his *temper*. Like
all

all people who are vicious, if once humour them, they aspire after more *indulgence*. *Balaam* expected, that as God had permitted him *to go* with *Balak's messengers*, that *he* would also allow *him* to do *what he desired*, when he came to the appointed place of exercise.—But as he was not disposed to be obedient to the commandment of the *Almighty*, his maker intended to *teach him better behaviour*, by a *severe reproof* and *disappointment*. He sent *his angel* to resist him,—who stood in *his way*, and intercepted *his march*.

No doubt our prophet's heart was full of the hopes of the *rewards* and *honours* that the *King of Moab* would advance him to, should he succeed in his enterprize.—Perhaps he was *telling over in his mind* the *large sums of money* he should bring back with him,
and

and the *particular honours* that all the *Princes of Moab* should confer upon him;—and how *all the men of the East* should reverence him as one of the greatest intimates of the *Divinity*. No *Bishop* that ever sat in *convocation*, perhaps, had greater expectations than *Father Balaam*,—when on a sudden *his ass started aside*, and almost laid her rider in the dirt. The *ass* was frightened, and it was no wonder,—for she saw what was *invisible* to her master.—*An angel stood in her way*.

What this *angel* was clothed with, or what *visive faculty* was conferred upon the *ass*, I shall leave to the *critics*:—but she saw something, which could not be a *spirit*, for *divines* say that they are *invisible*.—But that's not all, she started again, and went quite off her tract into the field.—To interrupt
a man

a man in his journey, who was *bent* upon it, in hopes of coming back laden with *riches* and *honour*, was *highly provoking*.—The offence was the greater, as the *prophet* was in *haste*:—we cannot suppose him otherwise, for he loved the wages of *unrighteousness*. Again! there is no accounting for *asses* when they turn *giddy*;—she rushed against the wall; and as the *prophet* seems to have ridden after the *usual manner* of *prophets*, we may easily suppose that one of his legs was in *no good condition*. She crushed his foot against the wall. Truly this is no good omen,—there is some reason to fear the issue of *this affair*. The ass is made to pay soundly for being so giddy.—The *prophet* had a *staff* which the *ass* would no doubt have remembered as long as *she* lived, had *she* not been an *ass*:—he laboured her with it to bring her

her to a sense of *her duty*.—The *prophet* seems to have been *old* that he rode with *a staff*, otherwise he ought to have had *a whip*. The *prophet* grows *serious*, but the *ass* more so,—*she* opened *her mouth*, as she had no doubt many times done before, but in a very different manner: *she spoke* by the immediate agency of *heaven*.—It is said the *Lord* opened the mouth of the *ass*. The language of *asses* is very ready to surprise them that are not acquainted with it, as their *dialect* is none of the *finest*;—but to speak in *human stile* was enough to have frightened *any man* out of *his senses*.—Perhaps any man but *Balaam* would have *fainted*; but his mind was too full of *riches* and *honour* to be easily affected.

The *prophet's ass* spake like *herself* in all things but *the stile*. Am not I
thine

thine ass? Poor humble creature! she had served him long enough for *such a reward*;—he beat *her*, and told her if he had a *sword*, he would *kill her*. Had she got the exercise of *reason* with the *use* of *language*, she would have undoubtedly changed her *master*, and left *his service*. The use of language, without a right exercise of reason, is not a *very high attainment*.—An *ass* may speak, but is still *an ass*. Our *ass's* master was like many since his time, who forgot *good services* for a *very small offence*:—nay, if strictly examined, it was a piece of *faithful service*, for it saved the *prophet's life*. How many have served their country faithfully for many years, that have been *served* like the *prophet's ass*—got *blows* and *threatening* for their *service*, instead of *any reward* or *preference*? Many *invisible agents* are watching
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ing the motions of *the wicked and ungodly man*;—when he is riding *post-haste* to dishonour his *maker*, though he does not see the *invisible agent* that withstands *him*, the *animal* that carries *may*, by *signatures* we cannot account for. It is easy for *one* of these *heavenly messengers* to dismount the *best rider* that ever mounted a steed.—When some *merciless wretch* is posting to fulfil the ends of his *cruelty*; when some *ambitious covetous usurer* is riding *full speed* to receive the *wages of unrighteousness*, and to distress the *widow* and the *fatherless*, and is found *dead* at his *horse's feet*,—who knows but some of these *invisible agents*, out of *pity* to mankind, are the instruments of vengeance upon these *incorrigible sinners*.

The *prophet's* punishment as yet is not equal to *his crime*.—He went with
a full

a full purpose *to curse* a people whom the *Almighty* had *blessed*, if he would be *so unmerciful* as to *let him*.—It was a mercy *his neck* was not in place of *his foot*; for he richly deserved to be punished for disobedience to *his maker*, and his *bad designs* against *his people*.

Such as are acquainted with the *political reasons* of the several *prophets* and *teachers* of mankind in *some churches*, do perhaps know that when they took upon them *to anathematize* their brethren, they had the *same reasons* for *their conduct* that *Father Balaam* had;—to get all the *gain* and *honour* by *it* they could. When men for difference of *opinion* denounce the *curse* of *heaven* against *their brethren*, there is some reason to suppose that there is *something else* at the *bottom* than a desire for the good of their *souls*.—It is
more

more likely that their own *importance*, and *private interest* and *honour*, are the *reasons* of their *conduct*. It has often cost nations considerable sums of money to get clear of *the curse of the prophets*.—It seldom happens that *such prophets* as *Balaam* either *bless* or *curse* for *nothing*. The least thing that can be expected from such as take upon them to *curse* their *brethren*, is, that they shew *their commission* from the *Lord* for so doing;—otherwise we must hold them under the same *predicament* with *Balaam*, and call *them false prophets*.

Balaam's conduct towards *his ass* is something like the conduct of *religious* and *civil ministers* towards *the people* they *rule over*;—and the language of the *ass* like the fruitless complaint of an *enslaved people*. *Balaam* had his *ass* *saddled*, and *prepared* for mounting, be-
L fore

fore he got *on* to *ride*. It requires some *pains* to prepare a people to bear a *yoke* of *slavery* and *servitude*.

In matters of religious concern, it is necessary to have mankind well persuaded of the *rights* and *importance* of the *clergy*, and the *divinity* of the *canons* and *creeds* of *churches*, before they will submit to be used like *asses*. The *jure divino* of *episcopacy* and *presbytery* are *pieces* of *trapping* that the *prophets* of the *church* prepare for those *asses* they intend to *ride upon*. If once they can persuade mankind that the *clergy* have power *to make laws* to bind the *consciences* of the whole *community*, they may turn them as *they please*.

If it would not give *offence* to some who have more *zeal* than *understanding*, I should compare the *articles* of
the

the *church* of *England*, and the *con-*
fession of *faith* of the *church* of *Scot-*
land, to the *trapping* of *Balaam's ass*;
—for it is by means of *these* that the
clergy ride upon the backs of the people.

—The *excommunications* of *those churches*
I would compare to the *prophet's staff*,
with which he *belaboured his ass*;—for
it is evident when common christians
start aside, and begin to think *for them-*
selves, and are not tractable enough to
serve their *devote masters*, that they
curse them for *heretics* and *schismatics*.

—And though these *common believers*
should be never so well convinced in
their *own mind* of the *truth* of their
own opinion, or *conscience*, like the *angel*
in the case before us, should stand in
their way, it is no matter of conse-
quence to the *prophets* that *rule them*,
—they must *suffer* for *their imperti-*
nence, and *be laboured* for their *disobe-*

dience. The people in general that *thus submit to religious slavery*, resemble the *prophet's ass*,—for though they complain of *hard usage*, they still acknowledge *their masters*, and say,—are not we your *asses*?

There are several *sorts of human asses* that resemble the *prophet's beast*. There are some that *start now and then*, and reprove the *madness of the prophets*, but yet continue under *subjection*, and are good *beasts of burden* notwithstanding. Of *this sort* are those who are always crying out against the *defections of churches and church governors*, but are subject at the same time to all *those impositions* that are laid upon *them*;—these are *braying, noisy*, but yet *tame asses*;—they mean no harm, notwithstanding all the *noise they make*.—They only *start* because they are a
little

little frightened by some scare-crow that happens to be in their way. If their ghostly riders lift their rod, and but labour them a little sharply, they will be ready to make apologies for their conduct, and return to their duty.

If conscience, the messenger of God within them, at any time *startle them*, as the angel did *Balaam's ass*, yet a degree of sound discipline, which may either affect their reputation or worldly interest, will make them return to their old tract, and say, *Are not we thine asses?* The articles of the church, and the *athanasian creed*, are like the two laps of *Balaam's saddle*, which are well girded upon some members of the church, by the force of canons and the power of deprivation. Such as shall be so giddy as to refuse to take on their trapping peaceably, shall be made sensible

sible of their *folly*, by being deprived of *their livings*, and *loaded* with *church censures*.

It is by means of *such trapping* as *this* now mentioned that the *authority* of the *clergy* is supported;—for they could not *ride* without *their saddle*. Were once the *common people* to receive nothing as *their creed* but *the scriptures*, the *clergy* would soon have no more *authority* than what their *good services* and *good conversation* procured them. They would then be obliged to *be helpers of the joy of christians*, but should no longer be *Lords of their faith*. Good men will always respect their teachers, *as long* as they are *examples of goodness*, and *condescend to men of low degree*:—but such as understand the *New Testament* will reject *all dominion* over *their consciences*,
but

but the *lordship* of *Jesus Christ*: they will *laugh* at *clerical jurisdiction*, and *reject* all *religious dictators*. When men have not the exercise of *private judgment* allowed *them* as their *natural privilege*, but are marked down for *heretics* for *every deviation* from the *national creed*, they are much in the same situation with the *prophet's ass*.

No christians have any reason to quarrel with the religion of *any country* where *toleration* is *allowed*; but they have yet reason *to complain*, when the *toleration* is *restricted*, and men's *opinions* are attended with *loss* to *themselves*, when they are both good members of *society*, and good subjects of *civil government*. Any christian may charitably enough say that *all political religions* serve no other purpose but to get *honour* and *money* from the *state*,

and in return to denounce *its curses* against the *supposed enemies* of *their mutual dignity*. An inflaved people serve the same purpose to the *clergy* in *this case*, that the *prophet's ass* did to *him*;—carry them to seek *riches* and *honour*; for it is always through means of *the populace* that *ambitious men* raise themselves to *high stations*, and advance themselves to *wealth* and *riches*. Where the government of *churches* and *states* is arbitrary, the inflaved people are obliged to *serve* the *interests* of *both*, with their *labour* and *substance*:—the *populace* are made use of as *asses*, to carry them whithersoever *they please* to *direct* them. It often happens that they complain of ill usage which they receive from *their superiors*, but as long as they have not a *just sense* of their *own liberties*, they proceed no farther than *some fruitless complaints*;—and then

con-

conclude, *are not we thine asses upon which thou hast ridden ever since we were thine?*

When mankind are once instructed in their *natural rights* and *privileges*, they will not only *complain*, but *struggle* to get clear of *oppression*. Wise men know what it is to *obey just laws*, but will never *tamely submit* to *slavery* and *bondage*. It is a *base degeneracy* to rest satisfied with what is *contrary to nature*, and nothing is more *contrary to the nature of rational creatures* than *to want liberty*: to submit to *arbitrary government*, without *resistance*, argues the *want of sense* of the *rights of human nature*. Men may yield when they are *conquered*, but they cannot reasonably acknowledge *power to be just*, where there is no *moral institution*. When *government* is not estab-
lished

lished upon *moral principles*, but managed by the *arbitrary power* of *one*, or a *few*, at the expence of the liberty of *the rest* of a community, their acknowledgment of *that power* is an obedience like *that* of the *prophet's ass*. The first slavery that men are generally brought under, is that of the *mind*; for while the mind acts freely, and is kept clear of *the chains* of *ignorance* and *prejudice*, it will be very difficult to inflave them.—It requires the aid of *false teachers* to seduce mankind, before a state can *deprive them* of their *civil privileges*. It seems to be a fact, tho' I have not seen it often taken notice of, *that the blending of civil and religious offices*, or *sacred and secular things*, has been an introduction to slavery in all nations where arbitrary government has been introduced. Where they have been kept distinct, there freedom has
more

more universally prevailed. It may seem a paradox, but it may be demonstrated, that if there were no alliance between church and state, there would be more civil and religious liberty than otherwise.--When church officers are advanced to civil preferments, or civil magistrates allowed to discharge religious offices in the church, they will be ready to make each of these offices subservient to the ends of secular interest, by having a double temptation laid in their way.—The minister will be ready to assume the prerogative of the magistrate, and the magistrate to enforce the dignity of the minister, by exerting his authority in favour of the sacred function;—and so in a double respect become lords over the people. For this reason men will not dare even to express the truth they are convinced of, should it seem to differ from the authorized religion, because

because of *a double danger* they are exposed to ; of being either heartily *cursed* by the *priesthood*, or *severely punished* by the *magistracy*. The mind being thus *crampt* in her operations, turns at last *servile* in her *affections* ; the consequence is *ignorance* and *bondage*.

This *alliance* also makes the teachers *indolent*, in the discharge of the *most material* part of their *duty*, which is to *instruct* men in the *principles* of *knowledge*, and to *endeavour* to *free* their minds from the power of *ignorance*. This they cannot do without first teaching them the *rights* of *private judgment*, and the *liberty* they have of judging for *themselves* in *all things* which respect the *conscience*. But when *their advantage* does not arise from their instructing mankind, but in keeping *them ignorant* of
their

their *true interest*, they will seldom be *disposed* to teach them what would soon *let them into the secrets of their policy*.

It will never appear to the supporters of the *alliance* between *church* and *state* to be advantageous to *their scheme*, to instruct men in the *rights* of *private judgment*, and *christian liberty*.— Did men once understand their own *liberties*, the *clergy* would have no *asses* to *ride* upon, to carry them to *riches* and *preferment*. Were men once well instructed in their *natural privileges*, the *alliance* would soon come to nothing: for if mankind considered themselves as all equally concerned with what pertained to their *consciences*, and that they *must answer* for *themselves* at the *day of judgment*, they would never give consent to an *alliance*, where the right of individuals to *judge for themselves* in *matters*

matters of the last consequence is entirely taken away. When they submit to such religious slavery wilfully, they are not one degree better than Baalam's ass, who although she complained, yet spoke with great submission to her master, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine? As I intend to continue this subject in another discourse, I shall here conclude, and say, Amen.

S E R M O N S

T O

A S S E S.

S E R M O N IV.

NUMB. xxii. 30.

*Am not I thine ass, upon which thou
hast ridden ever since I was thine?*

ONE could have expected no better language from *an ass*.--It is a pity any reasonable creatures should *imitate* such a *mean-spirited* and *servile animal*;—all the *dupes* of arbitrary power that
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submit to slavery, *civil* or *religious*, have *a thousand times* uttered words of the *same import*. Time has been when *this language* was *brayed* out of *pulpits*, and *squeezed* through the *press* by the *patrons* of *passive obedience* and *non-resistance*. Who can make any thing else of such words as these; *It is not lawful to resist the King, nor any commissioned by him, upon any pretence whatsoever*; but, *Are not we thine asses?* It is also bringing men under the same predicament to subject their *consciences* to *any power* but that of *God Almighty*.—When they are obliged, under the *pain* of *civil losses* or *church censure*, to *subscribe* to whatever the *leaders of religion* prescribe to them, is it not making them utter the language of the *prophet's ass*? *Are not we thine asses?*

I observed before, that *creeds* in the *church* are made use of by the *principal clergy*, in the same manner as the *trapping* of *Balaam's ass* :—to keep the *rest* in *due subjection*, that the *riders* may sit *easy*.—I am now going to give my reasons. This appears evident, because they keep the *reins* in their *own hand*, and pretend a right to fix *this trapping* upon *all officers* they admit into the *church*.

It is not every one that can demand *this security*, or that are accounted *judges* how to *saddle* such *asses*,--but only *those* who lay claim to the *office* of *master* of the *ceremonies* in the *church*. Suppose a *teacher* was never so well *qualified* to *instruct* mankind, and understood *religion* as well as any *bishop* in *convocation*,—and was *the choice* of a con-

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gregation,

gregation, yet he cannot be admitted till he humbly submit to the *rulers of the church*, and say, *Am not I thine ass?* As the common people had never any hand in framing these *creeds* and *articles*, nor was *their consent* ever *asked*, it seems plain that they have only been framed for the *benefit* of the *clergy*. If this *sort* of *trapping* were not more to *their advantage* than the *rest of mankind*, I apprehend they would not be *so zealous* in supporting them; for in nothing do they excel the *rest of the nation* so much, as in *zeal* for the *canons* and *articles* of *the church*. It is evident they mean no more by them than *a saddle to ride upon*, for in very momentous cases they visibly *differ from them*. It would much puzzle a stranger, that was unacquainted with the *church of England's policy*, to form a judgment of *her principles*, by comparing

paring her *articles* and *creeds* with the most famous printed sermons of her *bishops* and *clergy*; for though her *articles* be very *calvinistic*, the greatest part of *sermons* and *religious discourses* look much another way.

This sort of *religious machinery* serves all the purposes that the *public actors* in this *political drama* mean by it,—which is to serve the part of a *scene* in the time of *public action*, and then be withdrawn till some other *public occasion*. They do not consider it as of any use in *private life*,—otherwise every *subscriber* would make conscience of *preaching* the same *doctrine* in their *sermons* that they subscribe in the *articles*. One thing is certain, that either their *creeds* and *articles* are wrong, or their *sermons* and *religious books* in general are so.—And one would most rea-

dily conceive, that if *they believed* what *they had subscribed* in the articles, they would never publish the *reverse* to the world. For this reason I compare *them* to the *trapping* of the prophet's *ass*, which was only necessary when he intended *to ride*. Whenever the *clergy* are disposed to exercise *their authority*, they *do it* by means of *these standards*: to *these* they appeal upon occasions, and the laws that authorize them, but never unless to support their *own consequence* and *dignity*.—On all other occasions they observe them as little as *other men*.—They hang by *their trapping* till they have *some ass* to saddle.

A late champion for *creeds* and *confessions*, and the *alliance* between *church* and *state*, finds great difficulty to make use of the *scripture* without *them*,—and cannot see how *congregations* can make
a con-

a confession of their faith with only the scripture in their hand, so fully as the duty requires. To be sure if it is not in some measure in their hearts, I doubt much if the matter will be right;—yet I should like the scriptures rather better in my hand or heart, than either the articles or the athanasian creed. The apostle saw no manner of difficulty in what seems so difficult to this gentleman, when he tells Timothy that they are profitable for all things, to make the man of God perfect.—After this, where lies the difficulty? They perhaps may not agree to make the members of the kingdoms of this world perfect in the sense they would be perfect, but they answer all purposes to make them perfect before God, which one would think sufficient. Timothy is by some writers called the Bishop of Ephesus:—the scriptures were sufficient to make him perfect,

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fect, and one might suppose they could answer the *same purpose* to any other *bishop*.

I am perhaps wrong *here* ; for I had forgot that *Timothy* was an *over-seer* of a *single congregation*, and preached the *gospel* as an *Evangelist* ; was *instant in season and out of season*, and in *all things* did the *work of an Evangelist*. The *scriptures* might answer his *purpose*, who was no higher than a *self-denied minister of Jesus Christ*, but may not answer the *same end* to a *rich diocesan*.

Large Creeds and *articles* are something like *large grammars*, they help to supply the *negligence* of the *teachers* ; —but *disciples* would learn more knowledge from the *original sources*, if the *beauties* were carefully pointed out to them,

them, than from these *subsidies* of *human indolence*. Were the teachers of righteousness employed in pointing out the *excellencies* and *beauties* of *revelation*, and *engaged* in *offering* the *evidence* of it, to *persuade others*;—it would answer a *better purpose* than *to impose human dogmas*, that bear not the *least* resemblance to *scripture*.

It is alledged in behalf of *creeds*,
“that a *general knowledge* of religion
“is more easily *propagated* and *kept up*
“among the people by means of *them*.”
If we may judge from experience of
the truth of this *affirmation*, it will
be found to be *by no means* true:—
for ignorance of *religion* abounds most
where these are most *zealously* adhered
to. And let any man try the *expe-*
riment when he has *a mind*, he will
find that *those people* who read the *scrip-*
M 4 *tures*,

tures, and hold by them, have much more knowledge of religion than the most zealous devotees of creeds and articles.

One cannot but be sorry to find our *Saviour* brought in as a *patron* for *modern creed-making*;—for we are told, that he hath sanctified the *use of them* by *his own repeated practice*.—Because he demanded a *confession of faith* from such as he intended to confer any *signal favour upon*; and often said, “*Believest thou this?*”

Our *Saviour*, no doubt, required a *confession of faith* from whom he had a mind, as the *King* in *his church*, and the *Lord* of *the consciences*, and always required them to believe in *himself*, as both the *object* and *author* of *faith*. But the practice of our *Saviour* in *this*
par-

particular is no argument for *human creeds*. It may perhaps be an argument for requiring *a belief in the scriptures*, but can be none for requiring *our assent to human compositions*.—Besides, we are told by the *same author*, that *such confessions were introductions to miracles*, and must have ceased *long ago*, as *miracles* have done.—Taking the argument for *creeds* in his own way, he must either give up the practice of *creed-making*, or *work miracles*. Whatever *plausible arguments* may be offered for *church power*, and *the alliance between church and state*, yet after they are brought to *their height*, they end in *infidelity*.

The *author* above referred to, in stating a comparison between the *power of the legislator in civil and religious affairs*, affirms, “ That the legislator
in

“ in *religious societies* is bound to observe
“ the great *charter* of christian liberty,
“ and never to depart from *the prin-*
“ *ciples* which *it* contains. But always
“ following the spirit of *that*, he is at
“ liberty to make *laws* suited to many
“ *new cases* which *it* had not provided
“ for.” Be astonished, *reader* ! New
cases in religion which the word of
God hath not *provided for*. What are
these ? They must be *cases* which do
not belong to the *purity* and *perfection*
of *believers*. What could *any infidel*
have said more ? This is giving up
the *perfection* of the *scriptures* at once,
and giving to the *civil magistrate* a
power to make up *its deficiency*.

But we are told, “ to such a power
“ men *must submit*, or they *must give*
“ up the *benefit* of *society* in religion.”
A reader of the *New Testament* will
see

see no occasion for *this*. The *benefits* of *society* in religion do not depend upon *power*, but upon *will*. Men that are truly religious have all the *benefits* of *society* they desire, and they need no *power* to make them good members in *society* but the *power of truth*. If by the *benefits* of *society* in religion be meant *large benefices*, and *emoluments* secured to them by the *power* of the *magistrate*;—these christians do not expect, but leave them to the children of the *kingdoms* of this *world*, or whom they may concern. All they want is *permission* and *toleration* to serve God in their *own way*, according to the *dictates* of their *own consciences*, as the *word of God* directs them.

But we are told, “ *as single christians*, or *individuals*, they may enjoy
“ *the right of judging for themselves*,
“ or

“ or the *right of private judgment* in
“ *its fullest extent*, and each may pur-
“ sue his *own opinions* without con-
“ troul, whilst *each* with a *bible* in his
“ *hand* is a *church* to *himself*.” But
then says the *author*, “ What chance is
“ there that the knowledge of religion
“ should long survive *on this footing*,
“ where *no provision* is made for in-
“ structing the people in *their faith* and
“ *duty*, and where *every one* is left to
“ pursue *at his will* the *cares* and *plea-*
“ *su*res of *this life*, without any *stated*
“ *call* to think of religion.”* The
great emphasis in this paragraph rests
on the word *provision*. The author
judges very right *as times go*; for there
are none of the *clergy*, however rich
they are, will undertake to instruct man-
kind without *some provision* for doing
it. But yet after all, one would think

* Essay on Establishments, p. 63.

his fears very needless, “that men will
“grow ignorant of religion when they
“have the use of *the bible*.” “But
“tho’ they have the *bible*, they have not
“a *stated call to use it*, without a *suf-*
“*ficient provision* to excite them to it.”
And where is the virtue of all this?
To serve God only *for money*. This is
the way to make *hypocrites* and *pharisees*,
but not to make *christians*. But may not
christians make provision for *themselves*,
that they shall be instructed, by chu-
sing from among *themselves* *fit* and *qua-*
lified persons to preside in their wor-
ship, and support them by their own
liberality, if the *state* will not support
them without bringing *them* under *it*
power. But then our author will tell
us, “that all the advantages of *pub-*
“*lic* and *social* religion must be lost,
“or it must be men’s duty to join in
“society for obtaining of *those* *advan-*
tages.”

“*tages.*”* The advantages of society can never be lost, when men endeavour to edify one another in love, upon the *principles of the gospel*.—They may lose *those advantages* that increase *pride* and promote *luxury*, which to *pharisees* will be accounted the *greatest loss*, but to them is no loss at all, but what they have laid their account with. We are told, and with great propriety, “that
“for obtaining those advantages,—this
“necessarily leads to the appointment
“of a power, to provide for the wants
“of society, one of the chief of which
“is the means of *public instruction* in
“the truths of religion. *Fit persons*
“must be appointed to convey these
“instructions; and if *fit persons*, then
“there must be *some* to judge of their
“*fitness.*”† This power is only necessary to secure *those advantages* our au-

* P. 63. † Ibid.

thor has all along in his view. Where must this power be lodged? Or who are the proper persons to judge of men's fitness to teach and edify one another? There can be no power appointed but what is already appointed by *Jesus Christ*, who has plainly in *his gospel* told us what sort of persons they must be that assume this office of teaching. They must be *self-denied believers*, and the *servants of all*;—possessed of no power but that of helping the joy of christians. The church hath a better security for her instruction than any power appointed by *human device*. The promise of God secures to her all *needful instruction*. This author acknowledges that the providence of God may keep alive *a sense of religion* in the minds of men, but he says, “we are not taught *so to depend* upon his providence.”*—But I hope we may safely depend

* P. 63.

depend upon *his promise*, and are commanded to do so. Such as trust the promise of God will see no cause to appoint a power to provide for their instruction, which *Jesus Christ* and his *Apostles* have *nowhere* given to any order of men since their time.

It would appear that our dignified church guides do account *us asses indeed*,—who think that we cannot know the way of religion pointed out in the scriptures without *their manufacture*. This much may be said to *their praise*, that common christians are more obliged to any common *school-master* that learneth them to *read* than to *them*. A christian is not much to mean that has the bible in his hand,—and without any derogation from their dignity may learn more out of it, by a careful perusal, than from all the *waggon loads of divinity*

vinity the world hath been blessed with
since the *council of Nice*.

With regard to that power that is
supposed to be given to some select
worthy persons, in the use of which
they take care of the *instruction of*
mankind, it may be asked whether those
who confer it have not a right to take
it from them, in case it should not be
exercised for those purposes for which
it was granted? Suppose a teacher hath
three or *four* different livings conferred
upon him, is he not engaged to *teach*
and *instruct* the *several congregations* they
belong to? And is it possible he can
do *this* in *his own person*? And if he
cannot, who gave him a right to do
it *by proxy*? Christians would certainly
expect *some warrant* for *such a practice*
from the *word of God*. If any pre-
tend that they have *power* to do it,

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we would also want to understand if it is founded *in justice*. It cannot be supposed that a congregation of christians are like a *man's children*, whom he has a right to appoint a *tutor over*, as not being yet *fit* to chuse for *themselves*;—for they are supposed to be persons of understanding, and church members, and no man can chuse their pastors for them but themselves. It is supposing them to be asses to do otherwise.

This supposed power is far from answering the end it is assumed for; for if *fact* and *experience* can be any *proof* of any thing *answering* or *not answering* its end, it is plain that in *some places* of the nation the people are quite ignorant of the *first principles* of religion. If there were *school-masters* in the place of *another sort of teachers*, to teach the
common

common people to *read* the *scriptures*, and to point out their *excellencies* to them, there would be more religious knowledge in several parts of the nation than there is. When any power does not answer the end it is assumed for, *it ought to cease* upon the very principles it is assumed.—But when it is assumed without *any warrant* from the *word of God*, it ought never to be acknowledged.

Though our *Saviour* plainly declared before *Pontius Pilate* that *his kingdom is not of this world*, there have been some late attempts made to prove that it is; and we are told that our *Lord's* testimony does not prove that *Cæsar* had no right to interfere in religious matters. *Cæsar* might interfere with any religion that pertained to the *kingdoms of this world* as he had a mind;—but how

could he *interfere* in a *kingdom* that was not of this world? It lay altogether beyond his *jurisdiction*. Our Saviour could not have spoken in more *expres*s terms that *Cæsar* had nothing to do with *his kingdom*, than by saying that it did not pertain to *this world*; for he had *jurisdiction* in *no kingdom* but in such as pertained *to it*.

It has been several times affirmed, that our *Lord's testimony* before *Pontius Pilate*, does not decide the *right* of the *magistrate's power* over the *church*. But let this *testimony* be considered as *common sense* would direct any *plain man* to understand it. *Jesus answered, my kingdom is not of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.—Pilate therefore said unto him, art thou a king then?*
Jesus

Jesus answered, thou sayest that I am a king : to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness of the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

Any one may observe at first view here, that *Christ* confesseth himself to be a *King*, and that he had a *kingdom* : that his *kingdom* is not of this world. Whatever kind of *kingdom* this may be, no magistrate can have any jurisdiction over it, without being considered a *King* above *Christ*. If *Cæsar* had any jurisdiction over the church, to govern it, then *Christ* could not be *King* in that kingdom, but *Cæsar*.—At least it must be supposed that *Cæsar*, or the civil magistrate, whoever he is, has power over the church, either with *Christ's* leave or without it. If without *Christ's* leave and order, then is the magistrate the

head of the church ;—but if with his leave, then this should be produced from the New Testament. It is a reflection that both our Saviour's testimony and the nature of the thing doth suggest, that there can be no authority either in or over his church, but what he hath appointed by his own authority. If the magistrate have any power over the church, he must shew his instructions for it from him who says he is a King, and for that end came into the world.

It is affirmed ; “ If human power be
“ in any degree necessary for the govern-
“ ment of the church, that power must
“ be left in the hands of the civil ma-
“ gistrate, to whom all human power
“ naturally belongs, and to whom our
“ Lord here declares, that he leaves it
“ in its full extent.”*

* Essay on Establishments, p. 69.

But

But this conclusion is ruined with an *if*; for *human power* has no more to do with the *government of the church of Christ*, than the *ministers of Christ's church* have to be *civil magistrates*.— And they have no more connection with one another, than the *kingdoms of this world* have with the *kingdom of heaven*. *Christ* says, *he came into the world and was born to be a King*, and affirms, that *his kingdom was not of this world*. If he is *King*, then all the laws by which his *church* is governed must be of *his own making*; for he admits no *partners* with himself in legislation. He that *adds to or diminisheth* from the laws he hath made are guilty *in his sight*. The truths contained in the *divine record* are the *laws* by which he rules the *consciences* of his *people*, and they cannot be subject to any *human le-*
N 4 *gislation*

gistration in matters of religion. Even the christian's obedience to magistrates, as governors of civil society, is founded upon exprefs scripture precept; Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. —And it is because Christ by his Apostles commanded christians to be obedient to magistrates, that they are bound to obey them, and not because they themselves require it. So little power have magistrates over the church of God, to govern it, or make laws in it, that they have not even a title to civil reverence from christians, but what is founded upon Christ's authority.*

And may I not ask these zealous promoters of the power of the magistrate over the church, where do they find in the *New Testament* either precept or example for blending civil and sacred

* Rom. xiii. 1.

things after *this manner* ? What signifies what *Hooker* or *all the men of the world* say, if their sentiments are not founded upon the *sacred oracles* ? — They can never have any weight among *christians*. They may, like the *traditions of the jews*, serve the purpose of the *pharisees* and *scribes of national churches*, to blind the minds of the ignorant, — and by that means keep them in subjection to their *ghostly guides*. But this will appear, to all who learn their religion from *the Bible*, of no more consequence than *the trapping of Balaam's ass*.

It is no less than *absurd* to reason from *Christ's spiritual power in the church*, to the *power of God in civil society*, and imagine that men are *equally* deprived of *liberty* to make alterations, or allowed to *alter* in each of *these kingdoms*. — The cases are quite different ;

ferent ; Christ hath given a perfect system of all doctrines and duties that relate to the salvation of men's souls, and revealed all things that pertain to the conscience, that every man may judge for himself concerning those matters that they must answer for at the day of judgment, as matters immediately respecting their faith and obedience to God himself. The laws of civil society have only a respect to the bodies of men, and cannot extend beyond what pertains to the body.—The two kingdoms are just as different as the interests of men's souls and bodies are ; and the nature and spirit of the laws of each society are as different from one another as body and spirit.

There is a memorable passage in the above-mentioned *Essay on Establishments*, which shews the distress of the author
to

to form his *political image* of iron and clay.—“ They who in defence of religious establishments require a gospel precedent, require what the nature of the thing does not admit of. The gospel contains the history only of the divine original of our religion, and leaves it before it had formed any human connections. How then can the gospel furnish an example of such connection, or how can the want of the example be an argument against the connection?”

This is a fair confession that there is no example of establishments in the *New Testament*;—but perhaps as strange a reason is given for this defect as ever entered into the heart of man to conceive.—“ The gospel history falls short and comes not so far down as the forming of human connections, and leaves the matter unfinished.” But the question is

is not, whether the gospel history of churches leaves religion before it formed connections with the world, but whether it leaves it before it was perfect. It would appear, that as *this history* mentions none of *these connections*, the author of it intended there never should be any. If there is not a perfect account of religion in *the gospel history*, it is hard to say where we shall find any. And it is a sad reflection upon the wisdom of its author, to say it is deficient in such a momentous matter as the very constitution of a church. We have as whimsical a reason given, why there is no precept concerning this point in the New Testament.—The author tells us “it would have been useless.”—For men, no doubt, were wise enough to understand “that they might safely enjoy peace under the protection of government, and to unite their endeavours with
“ it

“*it for the public good.*” But may not men enjoy the protection of government and live peaceable, without *joining together* what Christ hath appointed *to be kept distinct*. Common sense will indeed teach men that they should *enjoy peace* when they can *have it with a safe conscience*, and live as good subjects under *any government* that permits them to *live and use their christian privileges*; and the *scripture* teacheth the *same thing*:—but this does not say that they are at liberty to confound *civil and religious matters*. As subjects of civil government they are to mix with *society*, do the duties of men under the regulation of *civil policy*;—but as *christians*, they have *another Lord*, and are governed by *a policy quite different*. As members of *a commonwealth*, they will be willing to pay *Cæsar his due*, and pray for *all that have authority over them*; the more so

so that they are christians.—But in all matters of *religion* and *conscience* that are *imposed* upon them, they will say, *whether is it lawful to obey God or man, judge ye.* They will be ready to *submit to providence* and *suffer*, when they cannot prevail with men in power to let *them alone*, but will never *comply* at the expence of *truth* and *conscience*.

All that lies within the *power* of the *civil magistrate*, is to *protect* all his *subjects* in the exercise of that religion they *chuse* for *themselves*; and as long as they continue *good subjects*, to give them *his protection*. But he has no right to interfere in directing men in their *choice of religion*, but to *chuse his own*.

I do freely confess that the *magistrate* has an *undoubted right* even to
make

make choice of *a religion to those* that submit to be *his creatures*, and have no visible existence as *church members* in *any church* but a *political one*. As they are his servants that he pays for presiding over the religion of *the state*, it is but reasonable that *he* should chuse work for *his own servants*. The *magistrate* has no doubt a right to dispose of the *revenues* of *the state* for the *use of government*, and those who are inclined to dispose of *their religion* for some of *its profits*, may make the best bargain *they can*;—but if by any unlawful combination betwixt the *magistrate* and *his clergy* any number of the subjects are *unjustly oppressed*, they have the greatest reason to complain, and say they are *not free*.

This connection between the *civil magistrate* and *his servants* has been called

called by the pompous name of *an alliance between church and state*:—but the word *church* has been very *unjustly applied* to *one of the parties in this alliance*. The New Testament signification of the word *church*, extendeth to *all professed believers of the gospel*, and one would readily conceive there could be *no alliance* without the consent of every *church member*. The *commons in England*, unless such as are *patrons*, have nothing to say in the *election of their pastors*.—The *clergy* frequently *elect one another*, and are sure to chuse such as are *well-disposed to the alliance*. The *magistrate* has also the power of presenting *many of them*, and leaves it to the *clergy* to *elect them* by a *conge d'elire*, which to be sure the members of such a *profitable alliance* will take care to supply
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with *good trusty fellows* of their *own sentiments*.

This is only an *alliance* between the *King* and *his clergy*, or between the *civil government* and such as *are hired* to be *its servants*. This can never *justly* deserve the name of an *alliance* between *church* and *state*, for the greatest part of *church members* have none to *represent them* in the *constitution* of the *alliance*.

It was observed already, that this *alliance* is the *principal cause* of *civil* and *religious oppression* wherever it takes place. The members of the *alliance* on the *side* of the *church* take care that none enjoy any of her *emoluments*, without *engaging* to be *tools of state*; and the members on the *side* of the *state* take care that none be preferred to

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any office under the crown, without engaging to be the servants of the church. Before such engagements were entered into, in which the whole nation were concerned, not only as to civil interest, but as to conscience, it would have been but reasonable that all the members of the church and state should have been consulted.--The clergy in parliament cannot be said to represent the church, unless they were elected by all the communicants in England, and have no right to fix laws upon them without their consent. Where is the reason of men taking upon them to represent people without their consent, and impose laws upon them which they never would have agreed to if they could have hindered them? In this alliance all the common christians in England are considered as so many asses for the bishops and their clergy to ride upon to riches
and

and *preferment*. They first enter into *an alliance* without *their advice*, and take upon them to be *their teachers* without *consulting them*, and then they join in *making laws* to cause them to pay for *their service*, without so much as ever *giving them notice* till they are *called to pay*. And what is *worst of all*, tho' they make them *pay soundly* for their taking upon them the name of *their teachers*, yet they never are at the pains to *fulfil the duties* of *that character*. In this *alliance* the *church* signifies no more but *the clergy*, and *the state* the *richest men in the nation*. — The two parties, to serve their own *private interest*, join in oppressing the *community*, in laying on *taxes* to pay *the pensions* of the *tools* of this *alliance*.

There is *some reason* to suppose, that if there were not some *considerable* worldly *advantages* and *emoluments* arising from this *alliance* to these *holy men*, that are so earnest in joining with the *state*, that it would get leave to bear *its own weight*, for *any assistance* it would receive from *them*. There are a good number of people that would join interests with *such* as are ready to pay *some thousands a year* for receiving *nothing*. *Balaam* loved to join with the *King of Moab*, but he was first informed of *great honour* and *riches*;—and there is the greatest reason to think he would never have *saddled* his *ass*, had he not had the *expectation* and *promise* of *wealth* and *dignity*. Were there not so many *honours* and *advantages* attending this *famous alliance*, one
might

might venture to *prophecy* there would be few *clergymen* in it.

It is near about as ill spent money that the government lay out upon the *dignified clergy* for this *alliance*, as the *charges Balak* laid out upon *Balaam*, in carrying him away to *curse* the *children of Israel*. The one does not answer the *purpose* it is said to be designed for, more than the *other*. If all that money that is spent upon *priests* in *England*, be designed to *maintain teachers* to instruct the people in the *principles of religion* and *loyalty*, one might venture to say it might be *all saved*. If there be any reason to judge from *facts*, it can be very easily made appear, that the people are as *wise*, *religious*, and *loyal* to the government, who bear the *expence* of their own *religion*, and pay their own *teachers*, as

any that are under the *nose* of *any* *bi-*
shop in *England*. Should the govern-
ment see meet to *lighten the taxes a*
little, that bear hard upon the *poor*,
and supply *their place* with *dean and*
chapter lands, and the *superfluities* of
the *dignified clergy*, I should venture
to pronounce, the *subjects* should be as
well instructed as they are, and as good
supporters of *civil government*.

When men are truly instructed in
the *truths* of the *scriptures*, and taught
to read *them constantly*, there will be
no reason to fear that they will be
bad members of *society*. It is in places
where the *scriptures* are *neglected*, or
concealed from the common people, that
they are *barbarous*, *ignorant*, and *re-*
bellious. Perhaps it might be affirmed
that *heresies* would *overflow the land*, if
there were not *church authority*, and
spiritual

spiritual courts. From *this* I see no danger, but from *ignorance* of the *word* of *God*. There does not appear to be a *better* method for *expelling* *heresy*, than by teaching *truth*;—and we can find it *no where* better taught than in the *Bible*.—And suppose the *church* of *England* had as much power as ever the *church* of *Rome* pretended to, what effect could it have upon the *consciences* of men, unless they were *first* determined by *evidence*, and *then* there would be no occasion for *any other* power. It appears from *church history*, that there never were *so many* *hereses* till *churchmen* pretended to have power to expel *them*; not by church authority *only*, but by calling in the aid of the *secular arm* to help *them*. The *Apostles* gave orders to *reject* *heretics*, but never to *fine*, *persecute*, or *kill* *them*. They left them in possession

of *all the civil rights of men and citizens*, though they refused *them their communion*. They never told us, that at any time *it would be lawful, when magistrates became christians, to call upon their aid to persecute them*, but left them to the judgment of the *great day*. They had a method of *preventing and taking away heresy*, which after-times thought *insufficient*.—They offered all the *evidence they could to persuade men of truth*, and when *they would not listen to it*, they left them to the judgment of the *Almighty*. When any in *their communion* departed from the *truth*, they denied them *their christian fellowship*, but never either persecuted them *themselves*, nor desired *others to do it*.

To teach men from the *scriptures*, and put them in mind of the truths
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contained in *them*, and leave them to judge for themselves, is all that *any teacher can or ought* to do;—and experience may teach the *world*, that christians can never be edified, but where *they chuse their own teachers*. Such as they employ for this purpose, they should pay them *themselves*;—and where the people really do *this*, it will be found that *they* have no want of any alliance with the *state* for the support of religion;—nor does the government find any loss with regard to the instruction of *its subjects*. Where religion is taught in *its simplicity*, there every soul is more likely to be subject to the higher powers for conscience sake, than where teachers are above their business, and neglect to instruct the people in the knowledge of the *scriptures*. If we may judge of the cause by its effects, there is not much can be said in behalf of this alliance

liance from the usefulness of it to mankind;—for except among people of *rank* and *learning*, which are not obtained by means of *the clergy*, there is not *as little* knowledge among *any protestants*, as among the *common people of England*.--*Multitudes* cannot read the *scriptures*, nor have they the *least* understanding *about religion*, any more than to know *a church* from *any other building*.—And I dare affirm it *safely*, that even *in proportion to numbers*, that there are *twenty* for *one* of *those* members of the *church of England*. How can it be *otherwise*, where men have *three* or *four livings*, and substitute any man they can hire *cheapest* to take care of the *souls* of the *parishioners*? Were the people instructed in the *scriptures* *regularly*, and taught to read them *distinctly* thorough, they would receive *some edification*; but except *some lessons* here and

and *there*, they never hear any thing about *them*. Instead of expounding *large portions* of the *scriptures*, to let the people see their *beauties*, and the *duties* that are largely scattered through the *whole*, the teachers generally *please themselves* with *harangues*, which *they* call *sermons*, that for the *most part* have *no relation* to *them*.

It will perhaps be inferred from what has been just now said, that I want to *overturn* the *constitution* of *church* and *state* altogether. Far from it. If we admit the present established church of *England* to be a *part* of the *civil constitution*, I find no fault with *her*:—I believe she is as good as *any other* of *the kind*, and could not give place to a *better*.—But then I would not have her to pretend to be what she is not, a *New Testament church*. She may be

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necessary to *political government*, and may serve the same purpose to the *state* that any *political church* ever did:—and I make no doubt but *archbishops* and *bishops*, and *their clergy*, are as useful to the *English government*, as the Roman *pontifex*, *Maximus*, with all the tribe of *his clergy*, were to the *Roman*. The christian religion is as much concerned with the *one* as the *other*.

As the *Apostles* of *Jesus Christ* never found any fault with the civil government of *Rome*, nor interfered with the state religion, farther than by telling them that *pleased to bear them* that it was *idolatry*, nor gave themselves any trouble concerning it, except when the *civil power* wanted them to comply with *their worship*, which they never would do,—so the followers of the *Apostles* ought to imitate them, and suffer the
state

state to have what religion *it pleaseth*, providing it does not impose *it* upon *them*. If indeed that part of the civil constitution called *the church*, seek to impose its *worship* and *rituals*, by *authority*, upon *those* who cannot in *conscience* observe *them*, they have an undoubted right to give their *reasons* why they cannot, and may safely affirm their reasons *are such*, whatever they are. There is *no* warrant in the *New Testament* for *any party* to impose their religion upon *another*;—nor have christians any right to say that a *state* should conform to *them*.—But when they are called to give the reasons of their non-conformity, they have no cause to be ashamed or afraid to do *it*.

When *any establishment* makes laws to compel non-conformists to comply with the *political religion*, upon the pain of *loss* or *suffering*, it is a plain evidence

evidence it is not a *New Testament church* ; for in the christian religion there is *no compulsion*. If the present national religion be *essential* to civil government in *England*, it seems abundantly evident that *none* should be admitted to *any share* in the government, but *such* as are of *that communion*.— But then they ought not to be called by authority to exercise any offices under it, when their consciences will not allow them to observe *the requisites* that are needful to qualify *them*. Churches established by law are not even satisfied with enjoying *all the profits* of their settlement, unless they can bring other people to *defile their consciences*, by endeavouring to *compel them* to do what they believe to be *sinful*.

It is supposing *non-conformists* to be *worse* than *asses*, to endeavour to *compel them* to serve in offices both *civil* and
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religious, where they must at first instance join in worshipping God in a way their *consciences remonstrate against*. When men are allowed to *have their own method of religion*, and are not *compelled* to any thing against their *consciences*, they have *no reason* to find fault with the *establisshed religion*.—But when *they are compelled* to support it by *their means*, and forced to comply with *its rituals*, or suffer *loss*, they have certainly reason *to complain of want of christian liberty*.

The *leaders of religion* do certainly account *dissenters infidels*, or intend to make them so,—when they endeavour to make them conform to *modes of worship* they can see no *authority* for in the *word of God*. This shews something like a *stated purpose* to ruin both *their souls and bodies*. The *Apostle* tells us, *that he that doubteth is damned if he eat,*
and

and *non-conformists* have *this alternative* to *eat and be damned*, or *forbear and be punished*.

If the *alliance* between *church* and *state* make it lawful for the *church* to *impose her principles* and *worship* upon *dissenters*, upon the *same principle* it will be lawful for *any church whatsoever* to oblige all *dissenters* to *comply*, or *punish* them *less or more*. If *this* be a *good principle*, the *protestants* in *France* have *no reason* to complain of *Roman catholic imposition*,—when a *church* of their *own persuasion* does the *same thing*.

There are many *simple slavish asses* among *dissenters*, who can without *any hesitation* conform to the *church*, and take on their *burdens* for some small *worldly advantage*,—or, to please their *friends*, *profanely tamper* with their *consciences*. Some of them who have got
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near the *top* of the *fashion*, are coming every day *nearer* to embrace their *old mother*, notwithstanding that they have so often *said* that she hath *played the harlot*, and many of them seem to have little other objection against *her*, but that she is not *yet far enough* departed from *the truth*. From some aversion they have conceived at the *articles* and *creeds* of the *church*, for their *supposed* likenesses to *scripture*, they rave against them, but from no *other principle* but *their enmity* at the *New Testament*, which through some *mistake* they conceive them to be like. They have still a *strong inclination* to go to heaven within the *trammels* of a *liturgy*,—and *some* of *them* have of late been making *zealous attempts* to bring in *organs* into their *meetings*, that they may have as *wanton* a way of worshipping *their maker*, as *their neighbours* of the *establishment*. These well refined *dissenters* seem to

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agree with the *establishment*, in thinking that *the Almighty* should be worshipped after the *jewish manner*,—and seem *disposed* to make the *New Testament conform* to the *Old*, as *decently* as they can. Perhaps after some *little* consideration they may agree to introduce *circumcision*, as well as they have done *white robes, altars, and organs*.—They would find *some asses* that would *submit*.

If the *civil powers* would be so condescending as to *make a law* for *circumcision*, and *annex emoluments* to it, the *prophets* of the *church* would do their *best endeavours* to *train asses* to *submit* to the *slavery*.—But as the pain would be most likely *more* than a *counterpart* to the *profit*, and the *priesthood* themselves could not *decently* neglect to observe a *religious ordinance established by law*, it is highly probable this piece of *church reformation* will remain *unattempted*,
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among the *rest of the things* the people are not yet ripe for.

I shall conclude with observing, that there is scarce a man that assumes the character of a *prophet*, but will find plenty of *asses* among the people to answer *his purpose*. Tho' *Balaam* and his *ass* are dead many ages ago,--yet *their offspring* are very numerous. But who would think that any of *this character* could be found in *Britain*, the very *toast* of the nations for pretensions to *freedom and liberty*? Yet true it is, that there are many *false prophets*, and many *asses* in *this free nation*.

Even *here* we shall find *slaves* in abundance: here we shall find men called *freeholders* bearing *civil burdens*, like *Isachar*, through their *own slothfulness*, and want of *spirit*: here we may find men who are called *free thinkers* giving
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up *their liberty*, and conforming to *other men's creeds*, at the expence of their *own consciences*: here you may find *offices* appointed by *spiritual authority*, to break the *stubborn and perverse temper* of *untractable asses*, under the management of the *sons of Balaam*,—who have in custody all the *trapping* that is *fit* to keep them *in order*. In *Britain* you may find *some* burdened with *taxes*, *some* with *articles of religion*, *some* with *creeds*, and *others* with *oaths and covenants*;—and upon the *top* of *these burdens*, on purpose to *rule* their *asses*, always some of *Balak's* or *Balaam's* children sitting,—and these *poor humble creatures*, at every threatening of their tyrannical masters, after they have started a *little*, returning and saying, *Are not we thine asses, upon which thou hast ridden ever since we were thine?*

F I N I S.

Murray, James

Sermons to Asses

London 1768

P.o.angl. 249 trn

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